Book Project

Seven weeks and 10,000 kilometers

Driving from Melbourne to Perth

Crossing the Australian continent from east to west

Realizing the dream first conceived in Sydney in 2003

A day-by-day account of the journey

With mentions of and thoughts concerning the great explorers

Disclaimer: May contain fanciful, patriarchal, and politically incorrect musings

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2003 – The Vision

In one sense, the great journey of which I am about to speak began nearly ten years before it in fact took place. For it was in April 2003, while I was still living in Sydney, that I first conceived the idea of making a road trip from the eastern part of Australia to the western one, *right across the Island Continent*. It would be a road trip from either Sydney or Melbourne, in the highly civilized and fairly densely settled regions of Victoria and New South Wales, and all the way to the distant Western capital of Perth – that lonely and mysterious metropolis more than two thousand miles away, gazing towards distant sunsets, mirrored in the boundless sea.

Even as I think of it now, in 2020, the brightness of that newly rekindled memory is causing pulses of delight to race up my spine, to somewhere near the top of my head, where they fan out like glittering, blossoming fireworks – I had such a powerful and persistent *sense of adventure* back then, and such a vivid perception of *future possibilities*, and such a burning desire to pursue *the great and the glorious and the courageous* – and I still do, to some extent; that younger self of mine remains alive within me, but it has been tempered by a solemn awareness of my growing biological age, and also by the vast amount of disconcerting knowledge I have acquired of the world, and of how it actually works.

That spring – or rather *autumn*, for I was not, as now, in Norway, in Scandinavia, but on the other side of the globe – I initially hoped to make the above mentioned road trip only a few months later, in June and July 2003, during the winter vacation that separated the two university semesters that year, for I was then a student at the so-called College of Fine Arts (COFA, as it was frequently called), which was part of the famous *University of New South Wales*.

The year before, in July 2002, I and two student comrades of mine had made the first significant road trip of our young lives, travelling 3,500 kilometers along the coast of Queensland in the Australian northeast, from Rockhampton in the south to Cairns and

Cooktown in the north. My appetite for *exploits* had been wetted, and in December 2002, I had spent an entire month exploring New Zealand. Then, in March 2003, I had celebrated Easter by surveying the southern and western parts of Tasmania or "Tassie". Now I was ready for something even greater – a journey from one end of the Island Continent to another.

However, my plans for a road trip to Western Australia that year were never realized – not due to the challenge posed by a metaphorical Great Barrier Reef, but for the most prosaic of reasons – I did not manage to find a car rental agency that would allow me to do a *one-way rental* across several Australian states. In other words, it seemed that no one would allow me to rent a car in Victoria or New South Wales and hand it back to another branch of the same company in Western Australia. One-way rentals within a single state were perfectly fine, though.

I privately condemned the rules as rigid, but I did not pursue the search any further. Had I tried significantly harder, I would perhaps have found a rental agency with fewer restrictions. However, as the matter stood, the only way out of the quandary seemed to be to buy a used car at the point of departure (from one of the several dealers at the dodgy King's Cross area in Sydney, for example) – an *old* used car, for I was not rich – and then sell it at the destination and get a plane to go back home. However, that would clearly be taking a considerable a risk, for I knew next to nothing of what one ought to be aware of when buying a used car, and nothing at all of how to make emergency repairs in the case of a breakdown.

Hence, after a few days of deliberation, I concluded that the road trip across Australia would have to wait, and set my eyes on Canada instead – partly since the Canadian dollar was almost as low in value as the Australian at the time (one Australian dollar cost roughly four and a half NOK, and one Canadian cost around five).

Two months later, when "*winter"* had begun in New South Wales – a term which in Sydney turned out to mean nothing more severe than a season reminiscent of a very

gentle Northern European autumn – I flew over to North America, and to the summer of the northern hemisphere, and did a road trip in British Columbia and the U.S. state of Washington. This would for years to come remain the longest and most arduous such journey I had ever done – some 8,000 kilometers had been added to the odometer of the Chrysler by the time it was over. The car rental agency, located in a suburb of Vancouver, was not very pleased, but I had reason to be satisfied.

The desire to drive across Australia remained with me, though. The adventure in Canada had been a substitute for the one I had truly wanted to embark on. An excellent substitute, undoubtedly, but a substitute nonetheless.

However, many years – and many more than I could have guessed at the time – would go by before an opportunity to realize the dream of crossing the Island Continent at last presented itself. I returned to Norway, the country of most of my childhood and upbringing, and, for a time, nearly forgot the Great Southern Land.

Yet I never *entirely* forgot it, of course. *How* could those marvellous, glowing memories of it possibly be wholly erased? I had spent almost two of the best, most inspiring and most eye-opening years of my life in Australia.

There lay Sydney, that uniquely beautiful and perfectly situated metropolis, concurrently challenging and worshipping the mighty Pacific – the Sydney to which I have since compared *every other larger city* I have visited, and which *none* of those other cities have come even close to equalling.

There, in Australia, I had reached the very zenith of the known world, or so it had seemed to me then, and as I had mentally gazed upon that world from the vantage point of Surrey Hills in Sydney, it had seemed to me that every inch of that world was *lying at my feet*, as the Norwegian saying goes – it was all available to me, and I was ready to take it all in.

There, on the other side of the world when viewed from Scandinavia, I had come to

accept, and gradually even to *love and esteem*, *the Empire on which the sun never set*. For *without* that now much-maligned *British Empire*, the Australia I had gotten to know – the Australia that is a peaceful and prosperous and unified country that travellers may easily and safely visit – *would never have come into being*. (That simple, but frequently obscured truth deserves to be contemplated far more frequently.) Moreover, the *glorious legacy* of that empire *in Australia* is nearly everywhere evident to the perceptive eye, *even now*, after decades of stealthy subversion and demolition – and *thank God* for that.

The Journey Begins

September 5, 2010

Late in the afternoon on September 5, 2010, I am standing at a bus stop in my home town in Norway. For most of the people around me, this afternoon is just the hectic end of yet another ordinary working day. But for me, it could not have been more extraordinary. I am not waiting for just any old bus, I am waiting for the airport express, which, if everything goes well, will bring me to the main international Norwegian airport in a little less than two hours. After more than ten years, I am once again departing for Australia.

On my back is a medium-sized LowePro rucksack, just small enough to be allowed onboard an airplane, stuffed almost to the breaking point with all the essentials I cannot risk loosing. By my side are a large, rectangular suitcase and an almost equally large duffel bag, jam-packed with all the items that I should be able to obtain replacements for, should they be lost or delayed. The flight tickets and the rental car reservation documents are safely lodged in one of the internal, zipped pockets of my rucksack. I am ready – or as ready as it is in my power to become.

While alternatingly gazing at the calm, blue lake beside me, which is surrounded by the dark green leaves of late summer, illuminated by the golden afternoon sun, and at the incessant traffic on the highway where the bus should soon appear, I silently contemplate

the state of affairs. The plan is to fly to Hong Cong via Helsinki in Finland, spend two nights at a hotel in Hong Cong to break up the otherwise excruciatingly long journey, and then fly directly from Hong Cong to Melbourne in Australia. I will arrive in Melbourne late in the evening, stay one night at a hotel in the city center, and pick up the rental car in the morning the following day. I will then have *seven weeks* to get to Perth, where I will hand the car back, stay a night or two in a hotel, and then fly back home, again via Hong Cong and Helsinki.

It is a well-thought-out plan, designed to eliminate stress and discomfort to the greatest extent possible, while keeping the cost reasonably low. The airlines – Finnair and Cathay Pacific – have excellent reputations, and the flight times are among the shortest I was able to find. The hotels already booked – the Royal Pacific in Hong Cong and the Vibe Savoy in Melbourne – both have excellent ratings. The car rental company is none other than Avis, which I have used twice before.

However, I know from experience that all kinds of unexpected events might take place. The luggage could be delayed, as it was when I flew to Glasgow in 2003, or nearly lost and partly destroyed, as it was when I travelled to Rome the year before. The type of car booked could turn out to be unavailable due to an accident, as in Queensland in 2002, and in Ireland in 2010, forcing one to accept a smaller or bulkier one. An illness could also strike, as in Ireland in 2007, when stomach problems forced me to stay put in a hotel room for several days.

None of these incidents caused very great problems, though. I remind myself that I have always been quite lucky on my journeys. Perhaps *someone*, after all, protected me.

Nevertheless, I am filled with a mixture of excitement and trepidation, which makes every impulse from the senses seem almost supernaturally vivid. Rarely have I seen such green leaves, such golden light and such blue skies as on that day of my departure in September 2010. Large, solemn questions, not quite articulated into words, haunt my consciousness as vague, fluctuating images. Will I reach my destination unscathed? Will

I ever see Norway again? This is no run-of-the-mill vacation. It involves six different flights and hundreds of hours of unaccompanied driving, often in the most remote areas imaginable, on the left side of the road, and in entirely unfamiliar places. It may also involve sleeping outdoors, for my duffel bag is crammed with camping gear, which, incidentally, has been meticulously cleaned in order to avoid breaking the law when entering Australian territory. However, sleeping outdoors in Australia could mean an involuntary encounter with one of the many creepy, crawly and poisonous creatures that are unique to Terra Australis.

I look at my watch again. Where is the bus? Where is it? It should have been here by now. All that is at stake, all that depends on that one means of transport, makes the thought of a serious delay balloon like a rumbling thunder cloud in my concerned mind.

Another minute goes by, and then another, and another, and still the bus is nowhere to be seen. All kinds of other buses come and go, but my bus remains missing. I am on the verge of calling a taxi when the tall white, blue and red airport express bus finally appears in the distance. To me, it is reminiscent of a shining knight, at last arriving on the scene to rescue the hopelessly besieged.

Moments later, I am on that bus, being carried at the greatest possible speed towards Gardermoen, the airport. The bus is some twenty minutes behind schedule, which is not reassuring, but the bus driver is a good one, and is doing all he can to eliminate the delay. We seem to float and fly past the brown, yellowish and dark green landscapes of south-eastern Norway in September, and then we quite suddenly come to halt at Gardermoen, a rather small, but very modern-looking airport, set in the middle of the large forests of Norwegian spruce and pine that characterize the region.

The next three hours constitute one long and now almost forgotten flurry of activity. The rush to get off the bus and get the heavy luggage onto a trolley, the crowds of people, the screens showing people which check-in desk to queue up for, the tedious passport checks and the expected excess baggage fee, the search for a toilet, the annoying, but necessary

security check, the endless rows of tax-free merchandise, and so on and so forth, and then, finally, the boarding of the Finnair jet.

It is late evening and sundown when we take off into the clear, cold autumn air, and slowly but surely leave the varied, lake-riddled landscape of Norway behind and cruise towards Helsinki, high above the vast and now dark forests of Sweden. From my seat at one of the windows, which is on the left side of the plane, and therefore now facing the northwest, I have a wonderful view of the sky were the sun recently set, and which is now glowing orange and peach and blue. Below it, and I can faintly make out the black and violet and dark blue shapes of Norwegian mountain ridges, and long, gray slivers of evening fog.

It is the only one of the thousands sights between leaving my home town and landing in Melbourne that I still remember clearly – such is the power of the beautiful and enchanting to overwhelm all else. One sight of something magnificent and glorious, and a hundred accompanying images of chaos and unsightliness are immediately plunged into oblivion. That is one of the reasons why beauty is so feared, and why this day and age sees a widespread effort to destroy it.

As we rapidly close in on Helsinki – this first of the three flights lasts only a couple of hours – I faintly glimpse the huge, level maze of lakes and forests that is southern Finland, presently darkened by the approaching autumn night. Then we touch down at Helsinki–Vantaa International Airport. I now have around three hours to make my way from the point of arrival to the gate where the Cathay Pacific flight will leave for Hong Cong. Plenty of time to relax, in other words.

Although it is almost midnight, I am somewhat surprised by how hushed the airport appears. Once most of the passengers from the Finnair flight have rushed on to wherever they are going, the long, naked corridors of the Helsinki airport become almost uncannily quiet and empty. It is evident that this is an airport that does not see much traffic at night-time. Well, so much the better.

My first concern is to find a toilet, and, to my delight, I quickly do. However, as it turns out, this toilet is no ordinary toilet. Once inside it, I hear light, gay sounds that make me think of Northern European woods in springtime. It dawns on me that is it birdsong that I am hearing, and so clear that I almost ask myself if there are living birds behind the sleek, white walls. What a novel contraption. To hear the birdsong of sunlit spring and tranquil woods inside an airport, in the middle of the night, is an almost absurd, but nevertheless pleasant experience, and four years later, it remains the experience that I best remember from those nightly hours in Finland.

After some food at a café, and two very long hours, the number of the gate for the flight to Hong Cong finally shows up on the departures screen. I am starting to get tired, but I do not expect to get much sleep on the plane. Sleeping on a large jet was hard to do even at the age of 23, and now, ten years later, I know it to be next to impossible. That is one of the reasons why I have an exquisite hotel room waiting for me in Hong Cong.

Once the huge Boeing jet is in the air, I spend the next eight hours listening to audio books – I have bought an MP3 player specifically for this purpose – and taking walks of the kind that are possible to take on a cramped plane where the majority of passengers are trying to fall asleep. For even an exceptionally tiresome reading of Adam Smith's classic work, *The Wealth of Nations*, does not make me doze off – not for a moment. The plane is nearly dark for much of the journey, since all the lights have been dimmed, and blinds are covering the windows, but there all kinds of muffled sounds, and, of course, the low, but constant hum from the engines. After a while, it seems more like a roar. Moreover, we are just pretending that it is night. Outside the plane, it is not dark at all – we are way too high up in the air for there to be any night to speak of.

The small LCD screen on the back of the seat in front of me shows us slowly making our way across the gigantic and mostly uninhabited wilds of north-western Russia. Then, after a number of hours made hazy by the lack of sleep and the monotonous noise, I note that we have changed direction and are flying in a south-easterly direction, into the

almost equally gigantic Chinese airspace.

Thirty years ago, a journey like this, from Finland to Hong Cong, would have been difficult, if not impossible, and more than a little scary, since we would have been leaving The West and flying across some of the most repressive regimes on the planet, where the death camps and re-education camps had only quite recently been shut down. Now no one seems to think about where we are at all.

However, China is still is the hands of the communist party, and Hong Cong, which thirty years ago was still a possession of the British Crown, is now effectively under the control of that party, even though most of the inhabitants wanted Hong Cong to remain with Great Britain, and the transfer of it to China resulted a mass exodus of people to non-communist countries like Canada and Australia.

September 6, 2010

It is broad daylight when we at last approach Hong Cong International Airport, which, to my surprise, appears to be located in the middle of the sea, on a more or less artificial island. As we have now been allowed to remove the blinds, and I am seated at a window behind the left wing, I can clearly see the South China Sea, and some of the islands in the Hong Cong archipelago. Having circled for a while, we quickly descend towards the runway. For a minute or two, it looks like we will come crashing down into the sea, as I can see nothing but water below us even when we are only ten or twenty meters up in the air. Then, to my relief, we suddenly hit solid ground with a familiar thump.

Everything then proceeds according to plan – until we leave the luggage pickup area and reach the final passport control point. Before proceeding to that, it quite suddenly becomes clear that I am required to fill in a kind of entry application and questionnaire, even though I am a citizen of Norway, and the information I have read states that citizens of Norway and most other western European countries are allowed to visit Hong Cong as tourists without applying for a visa, for up to 90 days.

I have to jot down my passport number, where I come from, what my destination in Hong Cong is, what I plan on doing there, and so on. Judging by other visitor's movements and facial expressions, I am far from being the only one who is a bit baffled and disconcerted by the unexpected need to fill in this form, and the stern looks and less than friendly voices of the agents checking the forms, from a position behind glass walls, do not make me feel better. The whole scene reminds me a little too much of the coldness and bureaucracy of the communism that is still alive in China. It would have been much better if the airline had alerted us to the need to fill in a form, and then given us a copy of it, while we were still underway, and had plenty of time to prepare. That is what usually happens on flights bound for Australia, for then visitors typically complete the "Incoming Passenger Card" well before arrival.

As I queue up for one of the desks, I start wondering if I have missed something. Is it possible that I should have applied for a visa after all? Around me, I only hear the fervid, quacking speech of Chinese officials. Will I be refused entry? Will I have to spend the next two days stuck in the airport transit area?

Fortunately, my papers are accepted, and I am free to proceed into the bright and airy arrivals hall, and then out onto the pavement and into the sunlight. For a few seconds, I am almost overwhelmed by the hot and humid air. I am not surprised, though – I still remember this peculiarly South Asian air from my visit to Singapore in 2003. So I quickly regain my breath and move over to the waiting cabs. A few moments later, I am sitting in the back of one of them, being driven at breakneck speed towards Hong Cong City, on the highway that connects the airport and Lantau Island with the mainland – which is really a big peninsula. The driver has not been very courteous, and seems almost angry, but I attribute his bad temper to his work, which is clearly very stressful, and probably not well-paid.

As we enter the outskirts of the vast metropolis in front of us, the sight that most amazes me is that of many dozens if not hundreds of very tall, almost skyscraper-like

condominiums, built in various strange, faded colors, and extremely close together, so that one could almost jump from one to the other. Some of these gigantic apartment blocks are almost as tall as the lofty, green hills behind them. It is not a beautiful sight, but rather a bizarre one, and one that would have seemed more appropriate in a full-blown communist dictatorship than in a former British colony that only quite recently became part of China.

I wonder what it is like to live in one of them, in one of the hundreds of tiny apartments that these condominiums seem to consist of. I already pity their inhabitants. In those weird, austere living-machines, humans are almost reduced to ants in an ant hill, to numbers – and that could well be the intention of the planners.

The city itself looks brighter, more cheerful, due to the large, glassy surfaces and futuristic forms of a forest of lofty skyscrapers, but I do not get much time to examine what I see, since we quickly arrive at the hotel, The Royal Pacific. It is located right next to the harbour, and consists of several large, shiny towers with a very posh and stylish reception-area.

I am relieved to find that the hotel has an ATM that accepts my credit card, since there was no such ATM to be found at the airport, and I forgot to bring Hong Kong dollars with me from Norway. After paying the cab driver and giving him a generous tip, I can finally check in and proceed to my room. I am feeling the edginess that often accompanies lack of sleep, and I am also very hungry. A porter swiftly seizes my suitcase and my duffel bag, and then disappears. As I wait for my elevator to arrive at some floor quite high up, I start wondering if I will actually find the luggage in my room when I get there. I am not even sure if I have chosen the right elevator.

Fortunately, everything proves to be fine. The luggage has already been put in the appropriate place in the room, which is quite spacious, and has a huge double bed, a large flat screen TV, and a spacious, bright bathroom. The only disappointment is the view, for

the room is not facing west, towards the sea, but towards other towers. I did get a very good deal, though, and my main goal while here is to get plenty of sleep. After ordering the largest European-style meal I can find on the room service menu – this is not the time for experimentation – and satisfying my hunger, I close the curtains, plug my ears and go to sleep.

September 7, 2010

I awake the next day, some twelve hours later. How different everything looks and feels after a calm, sweet night! That day, I enjoy all the features of my room to the fullest, and take a walk in the enormous shopping center located directly below the hotel towers. It covers several stories below ground as seen from the hotel, and terminates at the area where ferries leave for other parts of Hong Kong. It is a strange, noisy place, with multitudes of people and frantic activity. The sound of Chinese, and perhaps of other Asian languages, is everywhere. After a while I have had enough, and withdraw to the quietude of my room.

The highlight of the day comes in the evening. After having a meal at a restaurant near the hotel, I go for walk on the promenade along the harbour, between the hotel and the water. I also venture out onto one of the piers. The air is warm and humid, and the sky pitch black, but a multitude of artificial lights, in both red, blue, yellow and white, illumine the night. Some come from the arches that decorate the promenade, others from boats in the harbour, and yet others from the dozens of skyscrapers in the distance. It is a chaotic, bewildering display of modern architecture, glass and electricity, somewhat like that of a circus or an amusement park, only much, much bigger. Hardly any two towers look the same with regard to shape, height, surface and illumination. One has vertical, glowing pink lines, another has a cyan zigzag pattern, and a third has red stripes. It cannot be called beautiful, but it is certainly exotic – so exotic that I feel like I have landed on a different planet.

There is also something solemn about the scene, though. The lack of anything

reminiscent of English or British architecture, the absence of any reminder of Hong Cong's rich colonial past, is saddening and thought-provoking. In the second half of the twentieth century, the British did something no people in the recorded history of humankind had done before them, namely to more or less voluntarily dismantle a victorious empire, and to leave the world to do with what that empire had built as the world thought fit. The result is now apparent, and it is not pretty. I return to the hotel, and long for Australia.

September 8

The following day I leave the hotel in the morning, to catch a flight that is scheduled to depart at 10.20 am. What a wonderful day! I am both leaving Planet Hong Kong *and* flying to Australia. Thankfully, nothing unexpected occurs, and around eleven, we have taken off, and are cruising southwards, across the South China Sea. In around eight hours, we will reach Melbourne – a far more pleasant prospect to behold than the twenty or twenty-five sleepless hours it would have taken to reach Australia if I had chosen to eliminate the stay in Hong Kong.

After passing by the Philippines, Indonesia and Papua New Guinea, we start crossing the Great Southern Land, thousands of meters above its surface. The first region we come in over is Cape York, the large, hornlike Australian peninsula whose rivers are infested with saltwater crocodiles, and whose northern reaches are only accessible by expedition-style four-wheel drives. I fantasized about going there back in 2002, when I and my friend Mihran visited the Cooktown area, but it would have been too complicated and expensive to do so for a young student.

After Cape York, we fly across the enormous flatlands of western Queensland and western New South Wales. Generally speaking, there is not much there. A few dusty towns, and vast expanses of dry, monotonous forests, which, to a European, look more like deserts sprinkled with trees and shrubbery than living woodlands. Someone once said that Ireland is like a dull picture with a bright frame, but the words are an even better

match for Australia. There are of course some notable points of interest in the Australian interior, such as Alice Springs and Ayers Rock, but unless it is one of those very rare times when the desert is blooming, it is undoubtedly the Australian coastal areas that are most worth seeing – which is why I plan on following the coast as much as possible on my coming journey from Melbourne to Perth. If all goes well, that journey will begin tomorrow.

It is dark when we at last come in over the state of Victoria, whose remote inland is significantly greener and more varied than that further north, but also wetter and cooler. The climate of Victoria is in fact much more similar to that of the British Isles or Denmark than to the climate visitors usually associate with Australia, and September in Victoria is like April in Northern Europe, with chilly daytime temperatures, blooming spring flowers, and frequent nightly spells of frost. The state is aptly named, in other words, for it encompasses the one region in Australia that is truly like an England of the southern hemisphere – although parts of New South Wales and South Australia near Adelaide do come close.

As we commence our descent towards Melbourne International Airport, and the tilt of the plane allows me to gaze down on the vast city below us, it is as if the position of sky and land has been reversed, and we are ascending into a sky of stars, into a galaxy of glittering lights. I am listening to an ambient music piece by Max Corbacho – The Great Breath. It seems entirely appropriate.

With the alien atmosphere of Hong Kong still fresh in my mind, the arrival in Australia feels like coming home. More or less empty corridors, with rather familiar signposts, quickly lead us to the luggage pickup area, which has a calm and almost relaxed air. As always, waiting for one's luggage to show up is a slightly nerve-racking experience, especially since I am due to leave Melbourne the next day, and any delay will create problems. My big suitcase and my equally big duffel bag soon appear, though, and I am free to proceed through the final checkpoint. A small dog is sniffing for illegal items, but the personnel are friendly, and I have nothing to hide. The kangaroo in the Australian

coat of arms seems to make an ever so slight movement and say: “Good on ya, mate. I knew you’d make it!” I would have shed tears of joy, had I allowed myself to do so. Such is my relief to be in Australia, and to see that this safe haven has not changed very much since I first fell in love with it.

Yet Australia is threatened. The Australia I found in 2002 – the good, safe, carefree, orderly and beautiful Australia – is vanishing. In a hundred years, there will be little or nothing left of it, unless the present course is changed. For Australia is, like all European and European-derived countries, headed for destruction – unless a radical change takes place. Like Titanic, Australia and all the other lands carrying European civilization are doomed – but this time the iceberg has been deliberately placed in the sea beforehand, in broad daylight, and the captain is knowingly steering towards it. My lifetime, which will be over around 2050, is also the final lifetime of European civilization, or the increasingly distorted remains of it – the last, extravagant display of fireworks before the dead of night engulfs the smouldering ashes.

Perhaps you doubt this analysis, dear reader – perhaps you are even repelled by it – but by the time you reach the end of this book, your misgivings will surely have been lessened – if you read with an open mind.

Outside the arrivals hall it is cold, almost wintry – probably less than ten degrees Celsius. I put on a jacket and board one of the taxis. A man of sub-Saharan African origin is driving it. His mind is preoccupied with the Australian girls of Melbourne’s nightclubs, and he thinks mine should be, too. Or perhaps he is only joking. I politely feign interest and manage to keep a kind of conversation going until we reach the hotel, The Vibe Savoy, some thirty minutes later.

As it turns out, the hotel is appropriately named, for it has no more than a vibe of the once respected name of Savoy, and a slender one at that. No one offers to help me bring my luggage to my room, so I am left to struggle with it myself. The room is fine, though, with pleasant, warm colors and a delightful king sized bed. There is no view to speak of

from the windows, since the room is not facing the large, broad Spencer Street, but one of the minor streets, but the view is not important, since I will be leaving tomorrow morning. I arrange for a nice, hearty dinner to be brought to my room, and send a text message to my mother in Norway, where the time is only two in the afternoon, stating that I have arrived safely at my destination. Once the meal is devoured, I ready my two alarm clocks, and prepare myself for sleep by listening to some more relaxing ambient music, this time by John Serrie.

I also say a prayer. Tomorrow is the big day. Tomorrow the adventure begins in earnest. Tomorrow is day when I will pick up the car, make my way out of the city and head west – and stop wherever I find a suitable place to spend the night. I have not made a single booking for the journey from Melbourne to Perth, and I have no fixed itinerary. I prefer it that way. In my view, to be on that kind of open roadtrip is the closest one can get in this life to having complete, unbounded freedom. A journey like that engenders more than mere excitement. It gives rise to a different state of being, an altered state of consciousness. One is more awake, more alert, more in and at the same time more above life. It will be challenging, but I have done similar, though shorter roadtrips before. I can do it again. I will do it again.

The only limitation I have imposed upon myself is that I will have to be in Perth around October 22, in order to wash and hand in the car, relax a couple of days, and catch the first of the three flights that will take me back to Norway again. But even that is not set in stone. I could postpone my return. My Australian tourist visa is valid for three months.

Thankfully, I will not have to go far to get started. The AVIS car rental office in question is located at Southern Cross Station, the huge railway hub on the other side of Spencer Street. What an evocative name – Southern Cross. The name of Melbourne's central station is clearly derived from the name of a constellation of stars in the night sky, which is visible throughout the year in the southern hemisphere. However, until I booked the car rental, I had never heard of it, even though it is part of the Australian flag, which shows how little emphasis that is placed on Australia's Christian heritage. It must have given

those early explorers and pioneers some much-needed consolation, and now it will probably become a source of some comfort for me, too, on my journey through the more desolate parts of the three southern Australian states. With thoughts such as these, I fall asleep.

September 9

The next day I awake to a beautiful, bright spring day. It is still a bit cold, but the sun is shining down on the great city from an entirely cloudless, light blue sky. It is Sunday, and not by coincidence, for I chose that day of the week for the commencement of the car rental deliberately, as I reasoned that there would be less traffic to deal with. Still, there is a significant amount of commotion outside the hotel even on this day, which is not surprising. We are, after all, in the very center of the second biggest city in Australia, the home of some four and a half million people, if all the suburbs are included. That is as many people as were living in all of Norway when I grew up, back in the 1990s. Moreover, Sunday is no longer the day of peace and quiet and reflection that it used to be – not even in Australia.

After a quick breakfast in my room, I leave the hotel without removing my luggage, in order to locate the AVIS car rental office. As I enter Spencer Street, named after the British Prime Minister Lord John Spencer, I am confronted with the disappointingly postmodernist Southern Cross Station, which, when seen from the outside, is really not much more than a huge, greyish and squarish blob of metal and concrete and glass. Well, something like that was to be expected. Hardly any city is without one or more pieces of visual terrorism these days.

Fortunately, there is also a lovely display of light green maple leaves, glowing in the bright sun. They belong to deciduous, European or North American trees, and make up one of many reminders of the fact that the Australia of today is the result of a highly successful transplantation of Europe, and, in particular, Great Britain, to one of the wildest, most remote places in the southern hemisphere, where this transplant inevitably

merged with the wonderfully exotic nature of that place, and ultimately formed one of the most agreeable and most appealing countries on the globe. Everywhere one looks in Australia, there are names, buildings and institutions of European – and usually Anglo-Saxon or Celtic – origin, constantly reminding the inhabitant of the beloved country or countries of his or her ancestors, and of the glorious origin and history of the nation that in less than two hundred years became one of the greatest in the world.

Finding the AVIS office turns out to be less straight-forward than expected. I first walk south and then north along the station front, and then I search the inside of the station. Eventually I spot it. It is a tiny place, and not very well signposted. I proceed to the desk, not knowing that I am in for a most unpleasant surprise. The lady behind the counter, the only employee present, bluntly states that they were surprised when they found my booking, since they usually do not allow rentals of that kind, from one state to another, and that they do not understand why the computer system allowed it to be made. However, they were unable to cancel it, since there was too little time left.

I am first amazed and perplexed, then enraged, by what I hear, and by the women's rude, insensitive demeanour. How could they even think of cancelling my booking just days in advance? Do they not realize that I have come all the way from Norway, literally from the other side of the globe, to rent that car of theirs, and that my entire journey, the realization of my dream, depends on my being able to drive it to Western Australia and hand it back there?

Fortunately, I manage to restrain my righteous anger, and after a long and very unnecessary speech on rules and regulations, she allows me to sign the contract and take possession of the car key – albeit somewhat reluctantly.

The time has now come to get the luggage, which is still in the hotel room. I could drive the car over to the hotel first, but the amount of traffic in Spencer Street, the lack of parking outside the hotel, and the fact that I have not driven on the left side of the road since I visited Ireland more than two years ago, makes it seem wiser to avoid that detour

and instead bring the luggage to the car, and then, once ready, to just take the shortest possible route to the highway.

Due to the weight of the luggage, the fact that it consists of three different pieces, and the lack of a trolley, I have to walk back and forth between the car rental office and the hotel twice. Once done, I take the rucksack and the suitcase and leave the office to take a first look at the car, which the lady has explained to me is located in a parking house on the station's top floor. It is not the easiest place to find. I first have to search for the elevator, and then, once in the parking house, I have to look for the AVIS area. I approach it in a mood of apprehension, mixed with exhilaration. What does the car look like? Does it have any flaws? I am going to be driving it for six weeks – it had better be a pretty decent vehicle. All I know for certain is that I booked a car belonging to a certain class. "Full size", I think the term was.

This time the surprise is a pleasant one, though. Or, rather, a fantastic one, for pleasant is too moderate a word for that which now awaits me. I can hardly believe that it is *my* car that I see parked over at the northern end of the garage – but it does in fact heed the "unlock" command I send out with the key. It is of a deep, reddish orange color, and, as I notice upon closer inspection, it is a kind of sports car. The make is Ford, which makes me slightly sceptical, but the model is Falcon XR6, and the engine appears to be a four-litre V6. The transmission is automatic, as I requested, but it has six steps instead of the five that I am used to.

Although my knowledge of cars is severely limited, I quickly realize that I have gotten far more than I had expected to get. As someone would later say to me: "Wow! That is a *hot* car!"

The suitcase and the rucksack fit perfectly in the back seats – the car is not small, and its width is noticeably larger than that of the Toyota RAV4 SUV that I usually drive in Norway. After fetching the duffel bag and putting that in the trunk, I place myself in the driver's seat, which is low, but quite comfortable. I turn on the engine, and it immediately

starts making a nice, full, humming sound. Now I have to begin to get used to the fact that the entire interior of the car is like a mirror image of the interior in cars designed for the right side of the road. The gear lever and the handbrake are on my left side, not my right. The door is on my right side, not on my left.

In order to practice a bit, I drive in circles inside the parking house for a few minutes, first this way and then that way. Ten minutes later, it is high time to leave the station and hit the road. One of the most significant moments of the entire trip has now arrived. For this is, in a sense, a point of no return. As soon as I depart the building I am in, I will be on one of Melbourne's many busy and potentially lethal streets. One mistake, and the whole adventure could end right there.

As the gate opens before me, I feel like I am about to jump off a cliff, with a parachute that has never been tested before. Other cars are about to queue up behind me – I will soon have to move. I briefly survey the city scene before me, and then I hit the accelerator and am on my way.

Seconds later, I find myself on Spencer Street, moving southwards in the direction of the Yarra River and the M1 freeway. I encounter some perplexing road works, but I follow the car in front of me, and in around five minutes, we somehow reach the M1. It is a huge road, by Norwegian standards, with four lanes in each direction, and the amount of traffic on it is intimidating, but the powerful engine of my new car allows me to merge with it almost effortlessly. Accompanied by a long, bellowing sound, I move into the midst of it.

I now feel like one big bag of adrenaline. My heart is beating, and my hands and feet are sweating. However, I manage to focus sufficiently on "the facts on the ground" to stick to the speed limit and stay reasonably safe. All I have to do is follow the M1 until I get to the exit for Geelong, the city on the other side of Port Phillip Bay. There I will probably look for accommodation. On this journey, I am determined not to make the mistake I have often made on previous roadtrips – that of being too restless, a state of mind which often led to me travelling much too fast and attempting to cover far too much ground in

the time available. In British Columbia, for instance, I drove 8,000 kilometers in less than three weeks. In some cases, I began driving in the morning, and kept on driving until late evening. This time around, there will be no such errors – if I succeed in restraining myself. The one-hour journey from Melbourne to Geelong is enough for the first day in Australia. Moreover, in order to truly get a feel for a place is it necessary to spend *at least* a day or two there. On this, my great westward journey, I am resolved to make an effort to explore every place of interest I encounter along the way.

As I take a deep breath and lean back in the seat, I am again struck by how beautiful the day is. The sky is still crystal clear and blue, and on the savanna-like plains between the freeway and the bay, I see vast patches of light yellow flowers. So the flowering of spring has begun, then. I have been hoping to see great displays of spring wildflowers in Western Australia since I read about the phenomenon a couple of years ago, but I was not expecting any large amounts of wildflowers here in Victoria.

I have been to Melbourne before, by the way. I visited Melbourne during the Easter vacation in 2002, together with my Indian friend Vishal. We flew there from Sydney, stayed in a bed and breakfast near Fitzroy Gardens, and attended the annual International Comedy Festival. Yes, really. We also explored much of the city centre, including the charming old shopping arcades, where the floors are adorned with intricate mosaics, and visited the stark and magnificent Rialto Towers observation deck. However, when our week in Melbourne was over, we had both concluded that although Melbourne was a very pleasant city, with many points of interest, it was no match for Sydney. We also agreed that we were fortunate to be studying in the latter. Melbourne simply did not have anything comparable to the poetic splendour of Sydney Harbour, or to the glorious string of beaches just a few kilometers to the east of the Sydney central business district. Furthermore, the climate in Melbourne was cold compared to that of Sydney, as we had ourselves experienced, and the vibe of the city struck us as dull compared to that of its eastern rival.

Perhaps these statements will annoy patriotic Melburnians, but that was the impression I

and my student friend were left with in 2002. We were both very young, though – in our early twenties. It is possible that I would have appreciated Melbourne more now, as a more mature, historically aware person. Additionally, it must be said that I have still not found a city in the world comparable to Sydney, even after visiting such famous metropolises as San Francisco, Vancouver, New York, Chicago, Singapore, London and Hong Kong.

In any case, the above mentioned visit is the reason why I, on this first day after my arrival, am leaving Melbourne and aiming for Geelong. I distinctly feel that I have seen Melbourne before. Seeing more of it is not a priority. Want I want to do now is, in a sense, to continue where I left off in 2003, upon saying goodbye to Australia and returning to Norway.

I have been cruising along on the rather congested freeway for maybe half an hour when signs mentioning the exit for Geelong start showing up. It is awkward to have the exits on the left instead of on the right, but I know that I will get used to it. I soon leave the M1 and drive towards Geelong on Princes Highway, which is the old coastal route between Sydney and Adelaide, named so in remembrance of the visit paid to Australia in 1920 by the Prince of Wales.

A few kilometers later, I encounter the scene that will form my most distinct memory from the Geelong area. I have just left the Princes Highway, and am starting the drive down the smaller road named The Esplanade, when the calm, blue waters of Port Phillip Bay, and the green rim of parkland adjacent to them, come into view. As I am about to learn, almost all coastal Australian towns in Victoria and South Australia have a delightful seaside area with a road, footpaths and greenery referred to as an esplanade. This is my first encounter with the phenomenon of esplanades, though. It is a delightful experience. While leisurely driving towards the city center, I continually have verdant parkland and the sea on my left, and rows of fairly simple, but decent houses on my right.

Among those houses, I spot a hotel, or rather an upscale motel, called Chiefly on the

Esplanade. Should I check it out? I decide to see what else there is in Geelong first. After a brief round through downtown, I conclude: Not a whole lot. There are some interesting restaurants near the waterfront, but after that come areas that are remarkable only in that they are surprisingly clean and tidy. So I return to the Esplanade, and take a look at the hotel.

The rooms are at the back, away from the road, facing a kind of courtyard, and there is parking right outside the door of each one. The price is a hundred Australian dollars, or roughly six hundred Norwegian kroner, per night, which seems expensive, but I do not want to spend more of the day looking for accommodation, so I take it – but for one night only.

Once installed in my room, I return to the glorious sunshine outside. On the other side of the road, a beautiful scene awaits me. There is verdant green grass, sprinkled with light yellow primrose flowers, and, in the distance, a pier extending far into the tranquil, light blue waters of the bay. At the very end of the pier, there is a large white house, surrounded by small, white towers. It is clearly not a structure built to last, but it is nevertheless an attractive one. It is an idyllic, almost quaint scene, of the kind one might expect to find in England. As if to drive the point home, the pier is named after one Cunningham, which strikes me as an eminently Anglo-Saxon name. However, England rarely has such fine, warm weather as this. In a sense, Australia is like England plus great weather.

I take a seat on one of the public benches, and relax. On the path along the water, people are going for walks and exercising, in summer clothes. The bay is littered with white sailboats. Back in Norway, it is probably raining, as it did much of the summer. What a relief it is to be here! I feel as if I have left one dimension and entered another – one more luminous, more joyful, more serene. The trip has only just begun, though. Tomorrow I will continue westwards, probably to Torquay.

In early evening, I have a meal at an Italian restaurant in the waterfront downtown area.

Even though it is a Monday, the place is packed with people. Moreover, the pizza I order turns out to be fantastic. Geelong is clearly nothing like most Norwegian towns.

At eight o'clock, I return to my room. The motel requires its guests to check out at ten in the morning, a policy which very much surprised me. I have in fact never encountered such checkout requirements before. The normal in other countries is eleven, or even twelve. But, as I am about to find out, many Australian motels want their guests to leave exceptionally early in the day.

Due to this, I will have to rise before eight if I want to calm and stress-free breakfast and departure. For me, that is early, especially when I am on a vacation. But there is nothing to be done about it, and the sun is in any case down already. After a bit of Australian TV, I get ready for bed, in order to have plenty of time to get the eight hours of sleep that I need before the alarm clock goes off.

September 10, 2010

At half past eight the day after, I am once again greeted by radiant sunshine and blue, cloudless skies. My breakfast consists of hot water from the water boiler, together with the instant coffee and the two small cookies included in the hundred dollars – I never have much appetite in the morning anyway. Then, well before ten, I am off. My first aim is to find a grocery store where I can get some cheap food, for to dine out every evening would certainly break the budget. After searching for a smaller, independent store without finding one, I go to the local Westfield supermarket, which to me does not look like a supermarket at all. The façade is mainly reddish-brown brick, and there are no large, glassy surfaces or glaring signs. The windows look like they could have been made a hundred years ago. It strikes me as a perfect example of how even large modern developments like supermarkets can be made to fit into existing, traditional surroundings, and to look completely unobtrusive, if only the will to make adaptations and concessions is present.
There, in Coles, I get all that I need. I buy food that needs little or no preparation, and

that does not easily turn bad, such as biscuits, bananas, canned meat and canned fish and canned stews, bread, butter and honey, fruitcakes, fruit juice and bottled water. I also find the cereal that I remember so well from my time in Sydney in 2002 and 2003 – Kellogg's Nutrigain. For that, I buy some milk. Nutrigain may not be the healthiest cereal on the market, but I love the crunchiness and the taste.

Once everything is safely stored in the trunk, I leave Geelong and explore the peninsula to the south of the city – one of the two peninsulas separating Port Phillip Bay from the Bass Strait, the open stretch of sea between mainland Australia and Tasmania. My first goal is Queenscliff, the small town at the peninsula's eastern tip.

The country along the Bellarine Highway, as the road is called, turns out to be very flat, and that road itself is so bumpy that it hardly deserves the term highway. Eventually I get to Queenscliff, where the only sight I still remember vividly is that of an old hotel advertising rooms for sixty Australian dollars a night. That is a good price, but then Queenscliff is a pretty dull place.

Unfortunately, I miss the fort from the late 1800s, since it is not clearly marked on the map, nor well signposted. In fact, as I leave Queenscliff, I have no idea that there is a historically significant site nearly.

Fort Queenscliff would have been an interesting sight. It was once part of the elaborate defences that made the entrance to Port Phillip Bay one of the most heavily fortified such entrances in the world. Today, the military activity has long ceased, and only a few abandoned buildings remind one of that glorious past.

The trip continues in the same fashion as I leave Queenscliff and drive in a westerly direction, towards Torquay, via smaller roads close to the sea. The country is simply not very scenic. Fortunately, the views improve as I close in on Torquay. Here, the landscape is somewhat more varied. After inspecting the Esplanade and various accommodation options, including some lovely but expensive bed and breakfasts, I eventually go for a

room at the Tropicana Motel. The location is not great, for it is very close to the main road, and a long walk away from the beach, but the price is reasonable, below one hundred dollars, and the room I get is quite sheltered from the traffic.

I could have gone further, but my left foot is in need of rest due to a slight accident in Norway a few months ago, and I want to commence the beginning of the Great Ocean Road leg of the journey in the best possible conditions, which for me means early morning. At that time of the day, the light is less bright and much more golden than around noon. Moreover, it shines onto the land from a lower angle. This makes the landscape seen in such light appear as beautiful as it can possibly become. Its colors are more vibrant, and its topographical features are accentuated by the presence of shadows. Granted, there are places where evening provides better conditions than morning, but such places are rare in landscapes where the majority of the slopes are facing southwards, as in the coastal landscapes in Victoria.

In the reception room, I have a chat with one of the employees – a man whose name I no longer remember. He looks very northern European, with freckles and reddish hair. I tell him that I am planning to drive all the way to Perth, and that I will be crossing the famous and dreaded Nullabor Plain, the one thousand kilometers wide desert covering the land adjacent to the Great Australian Bight – which is the gigantic bay separating the south-eastern part of Australia from the south-western part. As it turns out, he has done the crossing several times, and loved it. That is encouraging, for I am slightly worried that the Nullabor could mean trouble. A breakdown in such a large desert area could quickly become very uncomfortable, and, without enough water, even life-threatening. Ordinary mobile phones do probably not work there.

Well, that part of the trip is still at least a couple of weeks away. Foremost on my mind now is the drive that will begin tomorrow – the drive through, it is claimed, some of the most spectacular coastal scenery in all of Australia.

Torquay is, by the way, undoubtedly named after the town of the same name in county

Devon in south-western England, not far from Cornwall. It is a perfect example of how early settlers named places in Australia after places in England, or in other parts of the British Iles. In this case, the name was well chosen. This Torquay of the Great Southern Land does have a setting similar to that of its namesake in England. As in Devon, there are lovely beaches, and, again as in Devon, there is a glorious coastal road to the west of the town. In Devon, it is the road through Cornwall, in Victoria, it is the Great Ocean Road between Torquay and Warrnambool.

September 11, 2010

The dawn on this highly significant date begins with a most unexpected sight. As I remove the curtains, I see that the green lawn outside the window is covered in white hoarfrost. Further away from the window, the golden sun has already turned the frost into countless sparkling droplets of water, but in the shade cast by the motel, the frost still lingers.

My breakfast once again consists of the instant coffee and the curious cookies provided by the motel. At around nine o'clock, I leave Torquay and head westwards. The scenery remains quite unremarkable for a while, but the morning light and the greenery of spring makes it pleasant enough. Then, as I approach Anglesea, the terrain gets markedly hillier. I quickly pass through Anglesea itself, which seems like a very ordinary small town, but as I continue west, I again and again feel tempted to pull over to the side and take in the view, for I am now driving along a hillside above the longest and most beautiful beach I have seen since the last time I was in Australia – a glorious, sunlit expanse of golden sand and misty, blue sea. Moreover, the soil near the road now has that special, reddish brown color, similar to rust, which is often associated with Australia, and the evergreen bushes are awash with clusters of lemon yellow flowers.

Where the road starts climbing a hill, I find a rest spot with a wonderful view of the entire beach I have been driving along. I get a sensation I have not experienced since I visited Palm Beach near Sydney for the last time, in July 2003. The warm sun, the blue sky, the

blue and green shades of the glittering sea, the succession of foamy waves washing across the shallows and onto the yellowy sand, the solitary headland far away, the hazy air created by the roaring breakers and the heat – there is something so appealing and uplifting about it that it is very nearly a religious experience. There is loveliness but also majesty, endless variation but also constant rhythm, youth but also timelessness, homeliness but also yearning. I am beholding the essence of Australia, the Summerland that actually exists, and a scene that is truly "a moving image of eternity". O Australia, what wonders I abandoned when I left your blessed shores!

I later learn that the name of this great strand is Bells Beach, and that the headland I see far away, at the other end, is called Point Roadknight. If I ever return, I will spend at least an entire day in this area. It is undoubtedly one of the highlights of the Great Ocean Road.

Having enjoyed the views of Bells Beach for a while, I continue on the Great Ocean Road, passing through the hamlet Aireys Inlet, and by the majestic Split Point lighthouse. The terrain gradually becomes steeper, until I have fairly high hills immediately to my right, and also greener and more densely forested, while the sea remains a vast, glittering expanse of blue. The road is now hugging the beginning of the Otways mountain range, a huge wilderness area of thickly wooded hills that separate this part of southern Victoria from the much flatter and more cultivated inland. Where the road makes some sharp bends, I stop at another rest spot and take some photos. It is a dazzling scene I have before me. The lush, green grass, sprinkled with yellow primroses, that coats the slopes between the road and the beach, the clear sun and the balmy wind, the long, misty stretch of white surf and, far away now, the headland where the Split Point lighthouse stands.

The road then enters a stretch of forest, but before long, I am once again treated to excellent ocean views. The next town now is Lorne. It is named after the Marquess of Lorne, who was lord of the ancient district of Lorne on the west coast of Scotland. It is a delightful name, full of yearning. A few more kilometers, and I am there. The place lives up to its name. It is set in a lofty, airy forest, where the sunlight filters through the

evergreen boughs, and on a fine, round little bay where the river Erskine has its mouth, and many of its streets climb the steep Otway hills.

I only stay in Lorne for an hour or so, to buy some groceries and take a look around, but it is such a delight simply to be there that I will later remember Lorne as one of the nicest towns I saw on the entire trip from Melbourne to Perth.

Since I do not find any cheap accommodation in Lorne, I move on, even though I would have liked to stay for a while. Fortunately, I do not have a go very far before another and better place to spend the night presents itself. A few kilometers outside of Lorne, nestled in a small vale between some of the taller Otway hills, I find Cumberland River Holiday Park. It offers both campsites and cabins, but in spite of the wonderful location, in the midst of pristine nature, it seems to be nearly empty. That is probably because it is early spring, not summer. In the reception building, I am welcomed by a tall, American-looking guy. I am told that the cabins cost a hundred dollars, which seems expensive, but since I do not want to go any further, I accept and pay up. Along with the key, I am given a jug of bird seed, so that I will be able to feed the parrots and the other winged creatures that, according to the American-looking guy, inhabited the trees around my newfound abode. I have been to many curious places, but I have never been encouraged to feed wild parrots before. This is getting interesting.

At the gates for entries and exits, I momentarily forget that I am supposed to keep left. An amusing situation arises when I meet a car that is leaving the camping area. For a few seconds, I stare confusedly at the car that seems to be blocking my entry. Then I realize my mistake and move over to the correct gate. The other driver appears to have understood that he just encountered a tourist, and leaves without making a fuss.

I now enter the camping, which is an oasis of green grass and primroses, by the banks of the small, but clear and glittering Cumberland River. On its eastern side, the camping is flanked by what appears to be limestone cliffs, of perhaps ten to twenty meters in height, and beyond them, and to the west, are the ridges of the Otways, covered in green,

unspoiled forest. From the mouth of the vale, where the Great Ocean Road passes by, I hear the rhythmic roaring of waves, braking on the beach. There is not a single cloud in the sky, and everything is bathed in a crisp, clear sunlight. It seems that it was not such a bad idea to leave Lorne after all.

The cabin assigned to me is away from the open area, and is set between large, shady trees. It is simple, but rather nice little building, with a spacious, sunbathed outdoor area. Inside, there is not much to speak about except the usual necessities, and the walls are paper-thin, but there is not any noise outside, so that should not be a problem.

What there is outside is a curious, exotic bird song, of a kind which I must have heard in Sydney now and then, but which I do not now remember that I heard there. It is a charming, but also odd mixture of sounds that is next to impossible to describe with text. The voices seem to convey wonder, but also pleasure and contentment. Having removed my luggage from the car, which is getting hot, I sit down on the terrace and enjoy the chorus, which mixes which the distant thunder of the sea, while my pale Norwegian face absorbs the warmth of the sun.

It is great moment, a moment of the kind that does not come often, but which, when it comes, engenders such bliss in one's soul that one cannot but believe that one is glimpsing a section of divine eternity. For so different are these moments from ordinary life that they seem not to be part of this world at all, even though all the components that together induce them apparently are, and even though they seem to occur in it, or rather, in us. They could be called moments of joy, if the word joy is given the meaning assigned to it by C.S. Lewis in his autobiographical book *Surprised by Joy*. They are moments of yearning, of remembrance, of transcendence – unforgettable, eternal and ephemeral.

In late afternoon, I revisit Lorne, mainly in order to get mobile phone coverage for the sending of a text message to my mother in Norway, but also in order to see that lovely place again. The sun has now gone down, however, behind the Otways – at this time of the year, it sets as early as around six.

The most memorable experience of this final excursion of the day takes place as I am driving back to Cumberland River. It is getting quite dark, and there are no lights along the road, nor any habitations, but the ocean is still clearly visible, and the western sky is glowing with a dark, enigmatic blue, and below that sky are the black, rounded silhouettes of the Otways, which seem to tower above the lonely coastline ahead of me. The Otways look far larger now than they did in daylight, and their stark, mysterious appearance, together with the fact that I am so very far away from home, on the other side of the globe, on a virtually deserted road through an almost entirely unknown country, fills me with a tremendous sense of adventure, but also very nearly with a feeling of foreboding and dread.

I have nothing to complain about, though. Compared to what the early pioneers and explorers had to endure, my situation is a walk in the park. What would Captain Cook have said of these slight trepidations of mine? He would probably have laughed.

My dwelling on the great explorers greatly helps me in banishing the more disturbing thoughts from my mind. My spirits are raised, and for the rest of the drive back, I relish the grand solitude and the wild majesty of the approaching night.

After a simple dinner, based on canned stew, it is almost time to go to bed. The checkout time is 10 am, just as in Torquay and Geelong, even though I am now in a cabin, not a motel room. That means that I should be in bed at eleven at the very latest, so that I can get the eight hours of shuteye that I need even if I should lie awake for awhile, and the time is now nine. I step outside to inhale some fresh air, and as I close the door behind me, I am taken aback by the immense darkness that now dominates the vale. Except for a dim ray of light emanating from the cabin to my right, there are no artificial lights anywhere. However, when I lift my eyes upwards, I behold an immense display of stars. There is such variation and such detail in that sky that I get a sensation which for me is very rare – that of looking *into* the heavens instead of just *at* them. I am not simply beholding points of light, isolated by opaque blackness, I am beholding veritable oceans

of stars, great clouds of glimmering lights, vast formations of innumerable distant stellar bodies, and even where there are no visible stars, there is a faint light – a dimly glowing texture of some kind. It can only be the Milky Way. I am looking into the universe, and as I gaze far into it, I feel as if it is exerting an eerie pull on me, and as if I could actually fall into it if I chose to let go of my foothold on Planet Earth.

Framing this hypnotizing window to the universe are the trees around the cabin, and the dark, barely visible wood-covered hills. A strong wind is rushing through the crowns of the trees, engendering a pervasive sense of motion, of unrest. Surrounded by the darkness, with the hiss of the gale in my ears, and the lights of the heavens in my eyes, it seems that I am moving too, and that I would be swept up and carried away if I would allow the forces of the night to take hold of me.

Then I remember the Southern Cross. I look for the constellation by that name, without finding one that is certainly the Southern Cross. But I know that it is there, somewhere in that immeasurable tapestry of lights. Among all the peculiar shapes and patterns, in which the ages have seen the contents of mythology, there is one that appears to have been placed there by the Lord of Hosts. For me, that is enough.

September 12

The dawn the day thereafter initially brings overcast skies and more gale force winds. The weather is somewhat disappointing, so I leave Cumberland River hoping for a rapid change, and after an hour or so, the sun does in fact begin to shine.

From the place called Sugarloaf, near Skenes Creek, there is no longer an uninterrupted blanket of forest covering the hills. Instead, the hills are now dominated by large, open pastures, which, in contrast to the evergreen woodlands, have a gorgeous, spring green color. This, combined with the proximity to the windswept ocean, and the modest appearance of the farmstead houses, makes for a striking resemblance to Western Ireland. Granted, there are some large patches of forest here and there, which is something one

rarely sees in Western Ireland, but apart from that, I am amazed by the similarities between this part of Victoria and the western parts of the Emerald Isle. Unsurprisingly, perhaps, I also get the same kind of feeling as in Western Ireland – which is one of great remoteness, peace and nostalgia.

The beaches, on the other hand, are not that beautiful – not compared to Bells, or to the beaches I remember from New South Wales. A mixture of sand and dark rocks dominates the surf. Fortunately, the appearance of the coastline improves markedly when I reach the small holiday town called Apollo Bay. There I find a very acceptable beach, even by Australian standards.

The town itself is a pleasant one, with buildings in white and various gay colors, and great, sweeping views of the surrounding landscape. It also has an air of tranquillity, of nothing but sunlight and salty winds and blissful quietude, but that may be partly due to the fact that I am visiting it well outside of the main tourist season.

The first people to explore this part of Victoria, apart from those belonging to primitive Aboriginal tribes, were those aboard the ship *Lady Nelson*, the foremost of whom was Lieutenant James Grant, a bold Scotsman. In the year of 1800, he and his crew sailed all the way from southern England to Sydney's Port Jackson, via Cape Town in South Africa. They bid adieu to England on the 18th of March, and arrived in South Africa in early July. On the 7th of October, they set sail again, reaching Sydney on the 16th of December.

It was on this great journey of discovery that most of the capes and headlands in south-western Victoria were given their present names. Cape Otway, for instance, the majestic headland jutting into the ocean to the west of Apollo Bay, was named by Lieutenant Grant in honour of Esq. Captain William Albany Otway in the Royal Navy.

It is also worth noting that Grant clearly had an eye for natural beauty, and greatly appreciated what he saw in the Great Ocean Road area. In the account of his journey, The

Narrative of a Voyage of Discovery, Grant states that

“The land is here truly picturesque and beautiful, resembling very much that about Mount Edgecumbe near Plymouth, which faces the Sound. It abounds in wood, very thick groves, and large trees. It is moderately high but not mountainous. We did not see any fires on it, probably from the shore being inaccessible, and much surf breaking on it.” (p. 76)

Albeit I have not seen the land from the sea, I certainly agree with Grant in his assessment of the land between Cape Otway and Torquay. That journey in 1800 must have been one of the finest experiences of his life. May he rest in peace.

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Upon leaving Apollo Bay, the road goes into the inland, and, until it reaches the Twelve Apostles area, only very occasionally touches or comes close to the coastline again. This is one of the faults of the Great Ocean Road, when seen from the perspective of a visitor – a significant part of the coastline cannot be viewed from the main road. On the other hand, it means that one can leave the traffic behind and explore some lovely costal areas using lesser roads, or one’s feet.

As I head inland, I get a memorable view of the wooded hills to the north, where, here and there, intensely green meadows, glowing happily in the sun, announce human habitation and civilization, and make the landscape of mostly evergreen forest significantly more beautiful than it would have been without them.
The following part of the route proves to be fairly uninteresting. The scenery consists of a mixture of forests and manmade grasslands. Occasionally, I also see large plantations and clearfellings – sights which the nature lover in me detests. I understand, however, that they may sometimes be necessary – a necessary evil.

As I begin to close in on the Twelve Apostles and Port Campbell, there is a great change

in topography and vegetation. The Otways disappear behind me, and the land becomes one vast, undulating plain, which is mostly treeless, and in color brownish. In the windy, chilly and mostly cloudy weather I am now having, it strikes me as very bleak and uninviting.

Judging from what I have read, there are some marvellous sights hidden at the rim of the land, where the heath-covered plain abruptly ends, and tall, golden cliffs tumble down into the churning sea. The foremost among these sights are the rock formations known as the Twelve Apostles, but there are also many others. Most of them are not far from the road, but they are usually not visible from it, due to the flatness of the plain and the height of the cliffs.

Since the weather is not the best, and I am getting tired, I choose to drive right past the Twelve Apostles visitor centre and the other points of interest in the area, intending to find a place to stay in Port Campbell, which is not far away, and then return and explore the attractions later, or the day after.

Port Campbell turns out to be a rather nice little town. It is located on a north-facing slope, and is therefore sheltered from the ocean, which undoubtedly gets terribly rough at times. By the town centre, there is a tiny, but picturesque natural harbour – a little dent in the otherwise almost continuous wall of cliffs in the area. To the north of the town, away from the sea, there is a pleasant vale where the land is quite lush and green, and not quite as treeless as the surrounding heath.

I immediately engage in that which in a few days will have become the procedure with which my every arrival in a new town begins – if the town is one I desire to spend the night in – a search for the best accommodation deal. In practice, this will most often mean finding a clean and quiet motel room for less than one hundred Australian dollars. Accommodation in Australia is not particularly cheap, and unless one is willing to sleep in noisy hostel dorm rooms, or put up a tent at a campsite, it is difficult to find a place to sleep for less than ninety dollars per night.

In Port Campbell, I find a number a number of enterprises that offer rooms for around one hundred dollars. The best value for money is offered by an elderly man that appears to be quite ill – he is willing to let me rent an entire small house for eighty dollars. The interior is rather dark and eccentric, though, and, more importantly, cold. In the end, I go for a room at one of the motels nearby, the Parkview. It has comfortable, light-colored rooms with large beds and televisions with Foxtel. The latter is not unimportant to me, for I am clearly in for an afternoon with rather bad weather, and since the ordinary Australian television channels have little to offer in the way of movies, there is a need for an alternative. Foxtel is far from perfect, but it is usually the only alternative that is available.

In the reception, there is a very likable girl, who turns out to be from Ireland. Unfortunately, she is married. She recommends having a pint of Prickly Moses beer in one of the pubs. I have never heard of this brand before, but I decide to follow her advice. Prickly Moses is actually the name of a brewery in the Otways, so it is a local product, and having chosen such an ingenious, unforgettable name, the brewery must surely have some unforgettable products as well, I reason.

In early evening, around seven, I stroll down the street leading towards the town centre. It is nearly dark, and a strong gale is rushing through the crowns of the trees. Understandably, the street is almost deserted. In the distance, I can see and hear the roaring of the ocean, which is sending huge, foaming waves into the tiny harbour. I locate a decent-looking pub and spend some time there tasting my pint of Prickly Moses and studying the sparse clientele. They seem friendly and well-behaved, but do not excite my interest. Once the glass is empty, I leave and walk back to the motel. The room seems very pleasant now, and I have decided to stay two nights, since I plan to visit the Twelve Apostles the following morning. For once, I do not have to think about the checkout time. I turn on Foxtel and spend the rest of the evening watching Ocean's Eleven. Then, as George Clooney and Julia Roberts hit the road to the perky song 69 Police, and the movie ends, I prepare for sleep, thinking of the road trip I am on, which is in fact as spectacular

as any movie.

September 13

Sunrise the next day is accompanied with yet more wind, but only scattered clouds. Fortunately, I have windproof clothing in my luggage, for it is less than fifteen degrees Celsius. Around nine, I am off, and about twenty minutes later, I am back at the Twelve Apostles Visitor Centre. There is hardly anybody there, which suits me well, for I detest queues and tourist traps. Now I get to experience the place as it was before the arrival of organized tourism. Well, almost as it was. A broad, well-trodden path leads me towards the ocean, which is not far away. The wind is now so strong that I have to push against it in order to proceed. The clothing on my arms and legs is flapping and fluttering, as if I were driving a motorbike on the highway. But what a feeling of exhilaration I get! Above me and before me, great, dark gray and violet clouds drift like mighty men-of-war towards the Australian continent. When I reach the slowly crumbling rim of the land, I see a sandy beach below the face of the cliffs, and outside it, the great, swelling ocean, with its white-capped waves on a surface of gray, blue and green. Beyond it, there is nothing but desolation – nothing but freezing water and icy wastes. I am at the very edge of the world of men, staring into the beginning of the vast, inhospitable expanses of the uninhabited cosmos.

It is at this bleak and wind-beaten end of the world that the curious limestone pillars called the Twelve Apostles stand. They are all that remains of the land which they were once part of, but which has been devoured by the wind and the rain and the waves.

These pillars used to be called the Piglets, and there was also a Sow, the nearby Muttonbird Island! Moreover, the larger of the pillars were never in recorded history more than nine in number. However, in the twentieth century, these nine columns were nevertheless renamed the Twelve Apostles. The reason was the desire to attract tourists, and the ploy appears to have worked excellently. At present, only eight pillars remain, as one of the nine recently collapsed.

I see them well when I turn westwards – the tall, craggy pillars of cream and gold, rising from the menacing, dark waves. As the aspect of the heavens change, rays of glowing light illuminate now one, now another, causing the pillars to form fascinating contrasts to the dark, rain-carrying processions of clouds above and behind.
It is great sight to behold, and I can thank the stormy weather for my seeing it. I cannot behold it for very long, though – I am getting cold in spite of my windproof clothing and my woollen Norwegian underwear. By making a great effort, I manage to shoot a handful of sharp and focused pictures. Then I retreat to the comfort of the car.

Once I have recovered and have had some food and drink, I continue to the next point of interest, which is the Loch Ard Gorge area. The gorge is a large, sandy cove, which is named in memory of the Loch Ard, an English clipper ship with 54 passengers, which sank just outside of the cove, near Muttonbird Island. Only two people, a fifteen-year-old boy called Tom Pearce, and a seventeen-year-old girl called Eva Carmichael, survived the disaster.

The tall cliffs, disappearing into the sea, and the windswept, desolate landscape, accompanied by nothing but the gigantic, enigmatic ocean, reminds me of the north-western parts of county Mayo in Ireland, which I visited in 2007, but the dark yellow, almost orange color of the cliff faces, and the strange shrubbery covering the soil, reminds me that I am in Australia. It is a wild and poignant place, made even more so by the inclement weather, which alternates between torrents of rain and flickering sunlight, and sends steadily recurring waves of gale-force winds across the unprotected land.

A little later, I make my way up to Peterborough, a tiny town to the north of Port Campbell, where I find a large, completely empty parking lot facing the sea, just next to a long, sandy beach. At the outermost edge of the parking lot is a small obelisk surrounded by a square stone wall and a fence – it commemorates James Irvine, a much-loved inhabitant of Peterborough, who drowned in 1919, while crossing a nearby river.

It is a pleasant, airy, tranquil place, with a 180-degree view of the ocean, so I decide to have lunch there. However, the wind is so strong that I soon return to the comfort of the car. There I sit gazing at the panorama for a while, while consuming some of my daily quota of bananas, fruitcake, cookies and instant coffee. The waters outside of the beach are evidently shallow, and this, combined with the awesome force of the gale, is constantly filling them anew with foaming, breaking waves. When seen with the light of the sun slightly behind them, it looks like the sea is on fire. The waves are all glowing, and so is the air above them, which is saturated with the reams of spray lifted off the tops of the waves and borne along by the wind. Even though I have spent significant portions of my life in the vicinity of the sea, I have rarely seen anything quite like the blaze of water and light that I am seeing here at Peterborough now. The fjords of Norway, even the more open ones, are usually too sheltered for conditions such as these to arise.

After this lunch, I continue westwards and then northwards on the Great Ocean Road. At the Bay of Islands, the road departs from the sea and reveals a very different kind of scenery. Before me lies a vast, open plain, where the emerald green of springtime pastures, with a curious scattering of isolated eucalyptus trees, stretches into infinity. Above is a tall, dark blue sky, where white and gray clouds billow into towers, as if part of a slow-motion film.

Never in my life have I seen such immense grazing lands. They remind me of images from the savanna in Africa. For a while I keep driving, looking for something to focus my attention on, but there is only the grassy plain, which seems to go on forever. Eventually I turn back, not wanting to go even further away from my base in Port Campbell.

Once back in the motel room, I study the map I carry with me, and come to the conclusion that the savanna I saw carries the name Nirranda. It is one of the large dairy farming districts in the state of Victoria. Tomorrow I will pass through it yet again, on my way to the city of Warrnambool, where the tourist information states that the Great Ocean Road comes to an end.

September 14

This day begins with overcast skies and drops of rain. This makes the drive to Warrnambool a rather dreary experience. The land is almost entirely flat, and the lack of sunlight makes everything look dull. But it is inevitable that a great journey such as this will come with less than pleasant days. I know that the situation will improve.

The city of Warrnambool turns out to be just as disagreeable as the crudity of the name seems to suggest. Even though it has some 30,000 inhabitants, I see nothing very interesting. The architecture is just as dull and uninspiring as the sky above it, the shops the same unremarkable chain-stores as in so many other places. After buying a supply of groceries, I am delighted to be able to depart Warrnambool and continue westwards.

Next on my route is the small town of Port Fairy. The contrast in appearance between it and Warrnambool could hardly be greater. I immediately take a liking to it. Port Fairy is a historic town, and one that has taken unusually good care of its architectural heritage. The result is quite striking. It abounds in well-proportioned, dignified and interesting buildings. Among the ones I take particular notice of is the Lecture Hall from 1889, with its tall and classical, light yellow façade.

But it is not only the buildings that are beautiful. I am also impressed by the large, dark green conifer trees that line several of the streets. I have seen such trees before, but never in such large numbers as here. Their thick boughs combine with the many fine buildings to give a land that in its natural condition must have looked awfully plain and monotonous, a delightful sense of luxuriance and loftiness.

In conclusion, Port Fairy is one of those increasingly rare towns that look good even in bad weather – one of those endangered urban environments that have not yet been destroyed by the arrogant and alienating anti-architecture of modernism and post-modernism, and that show us how much we have lost, how much we could have had, and

how many opportunities that have been wasted.

Unfortunately, I fail to find any reasonably priced accommodation in Port Fairy, and since it is still quite early in the day, I decide to continue on to Portland, a city to the west of Port Fairy which seems to occupy a very promising location – the eastern side of a large, protruding cape. It is the westernmost costal settlement of any size in Victoria – not far from Portland is the border between Victoria and South Australia.

To leave Port Fairy after only a few hours turns out to be a mistake. As I approach the vicinity of Portland, my heart sinks. In the distance, on the other side of the bay, the one object that captures my attention is a giant factory of grim appearance, with smoking chimney stacks. As I will soon learn, it is Portland's aluminium smelter. I had not expected Portland to be dominated by heavy industry. I am tempted to turn back, but I will have to go through Portland anyway in order to take the coastal route into South Australia. I might as well go there now. At least I will save some money – and the tip of the cape looks interesting.

Upon arrival in Portland, I immediately start looking for accommodation. The city turns out to be smaller than I had expected, and the center, if that is the proper word for it, consists of not much more than one street lined with the usual shops. The buildings are, for the most part, low and simple and boxlike, and often rather shabby-looking. The scene is much more reminiscent of America than of Europe. Had it not been for the cars and the asphalt and the power lines, it could almost have been a set in a grim old Western movie – it is how shoddy and uncivilized and lawless it looks.

The foreshore is quite pleasant, though. There are nice, green lawns, a small hill with a little red and white lighthouse, and sweeping views of the sea. However, there are no significant points of interest. I continue the search for accommodation.

After a while, I wind up at a motel in a somewhat secluded location, between the foreshore and the main street, the Mariner. It is not a very modern place, and the interior

of the room I am shown looks quite dated, but it seems clean and quiet, and the price is among the lowest I have come across so far for a motel room – around 70 Australian dollars. I take the room immediately.

As it turns out, the motel is run by an elderly lady of German ancestry. She is a friendly, rather extroverted woman, and she invites me to have tea with her. I learn that quite a few Germans, including her ancestors, immigrated to Australia in the 1800s, and that many of them went to Adelaide, the capital of South Australia, which I should reach in three or four days.

After this most cordial reception, I withdraw to my room. I need to rest one of my feet, in which the muscles and ligaments still begin to ache upon exertion, even though the slight accident that caused the problem happened more than two months ago.

In the evening, I begin to realize that I am in for a frightfully cold night. Except for an old and far too noisy air conditioner, I cannot find a single implement that can be used to heat the room. Thankfully, I have my several pieces of woollen Norwegian underwear, which together cover both the upper and the lower body. I also have some thick woollen socks. This enables me stay reasonably comfortable. But this is not what I came to Australia for. The situation reminds me of stories told to me by people who have visited the British Isles outside of the summer season – stories of homes with virtually no heating, making even moderately low temperatures highly unpleasant. Yes, Norway has a cold climate, and winter temperatures of minus ten degrees Celsius are not uncommon, but Norwegian homes are almost always warm and comfortable, no matter how cold it is outside, thanks to good isolation and reasonably priced electricity.

September 15

One night in conditions such as those at the Mariner is more than enough, so the morning thereafter, I leave and start looking for an alternative. The weather is still not very good, and I would like to rest my aching foot for another day, and do some laundry, so I do not

want to depart from Portland and enter South Australia just yet. One hour later, I have moved into a room at the Melaleuca Motel, only a five-minute drive from the Mariner. It is well heated, and has a large TV equipped with Foxtel channels. Heaven!

While relaxing at the Melaleuca that day, I ponder the history of the region. This was actually the first area in what is now the state of Victoria that was permanently settled by Europeans, and the first of these Europeans was a thrifty and determined Englishman by the name of Edward Henty (1810–1878). In the early 1830s, when parts of the Henty family were staying in Tasmania, Edward Henty was sent over to the mainland in order to look for land suitable for agriculture. After some explorations, he and his father decided that they would start a settlement at Portland Bay, and on the 19th of November 1834, at 8 am, Edward arrived at the agreed-upon location in the Thistle, having with him labourers, stock, potatoes and seed. He later told the following anecdote:

"I stuck a plough into the ground, struck a she-oak root, and broke the point; cleaned my gun, shot a kangaroo, mended the bellows, blew the forge fire, straightened the plough, and turned the first sod in Victoria."

It sounds uncomplicated, but I wonder: Would any of today's Europeans have the skills, the courage and the fortitude to do what Edward Henty did? It is easy to forget that most of the inventions that we now take for granted had not even come into being when the Henty family immigrated to Australia. There were no electricity, no light bulbs, no telephones, no computers and no GPS devices. Moreover, what would become the state of Victoria was then little more than a wilderness, only sparsely populated, and only by primitive, semi-nomadic hunter-gatherers. These hunter-gatherers remained trapped in the Stone Age, several millennia after the civilizations of Europe, the Middle East, India and China had moved on to more advanced stages. There were no detailed maps, no roads, no wheels, no iron tools, no sophisticated buildings, no herds of domesticated animals. There were probably some beautiful spots in that wilderness, plentiful in game, and there may have been areas where the aborigines had manipulated and opened up the land using fire, but most of the country would have consisted of impenetrable bush land –

a vast and dangerous maze of woodland and shrubbery. If something went wrong, there was no button one could push to get help. Hunger and thirst, illness and death were never far away.

People may think they grasp what this meant, but in reality, most do not. Only those who have spent weeks in the wilderness can begin to understand what the Henty family was up against, and even the spending of considerable time in the wilderness does not really replicate the experience of the pioneers of the early 1800s. For we bring all kinds of modern implements with us into the wilderness, as well as the knowledge that we will certainly return to the civilization we leave behind in a not very distant future.

(The lost opportunities – what could have been if they had stayed English longer)

September 16

Upon my leaving Portland, I begin to recover a sense of optimism and adventure. I have had a good rest, I am leaving that drab, industrial town, and I am heading westwards once again, on an empty highway, only accompanied by the car and the road, the land and the sky. There is a strong southern wind, and all the bushes and the trees are moving, waving and whispering. It is not at all warm, the temperature is no more than ten degrees, and now and then some drops of rain wet the windscreen, but every once in a while rays of misty sunlight shoot down from between the streams of drifting clouds, momentarily illuminating the canopies of evergreen gums, with cinnamon and silver trunks, and bushes carrying a plethora of spring flowers – in some cases lemon yellow, in others milky white. It is only me and the Creator now – this consciousness of mine and that great, unbounded Mystery it is encountering – a Mystery which seems to communicate with me, envelop me, reveal its inexpressible beauty to me – as I rapidly, yet slowly move into unchartered territory.

Regarding spring flowers, I am now reminded of the surprising observation I already made while on the Great Ocean Road – that in Australia, or at least in Victoria, there are

far more such flowers on the bushes than on the ground. In Europe and North America, the reverse is true. I wonder what the reason for that is. However, I am still hoping that I will get to see large numbers of wildflowers on the ground, even carpets of them, when I reach Western Australia. According to the information I read before leaving, there can be absolutely stunning displays of wildflowers in that state during spring.

Between the city of Portland and the hamlet called Nelson, there is hardly anything of great significance. There are native woods, plantations of pine, and then more woods. I still have a pleasant journey, though. I nearly have the road to myself, which is probably due to the fact that I have chosen the road that is nearest to the coast, the C192, instead of the main highway, the A1, which is further inland.

In the vicinity of Nelson, I chose to drive down a minor road leading to a beach. A wooden stairway takes me from the empty parking lot, up the back side of a row of sand dunes, and down to a viewing platform, complete with benches.

There are so many such displays of civilization, of attention to detail, of thoughtfulness, in the Great Southern Land, and especially along the coast – far more than in Norway, which is also a country with a very long coastline. Is it an echo of the Englishman's amazing, meticulous care for his surroundings, so noticeable in old English villages and in the English countryside? I think it must be. There is also a very significant Irish element in Australia, but although the Irish "folk soul" has many positive aspects, such as love of music, gardener-like cultivation of the local environment cannot be said to be one of them.

From the viewing platform, I behold a light-colored, sandy beach which seems to go on forever, both to the east and to the west. Outside of it, there is only the ocean, which also seems to go on forever, and which now, in the cold wind and under the dark, ominous clouds dominating the sky, appears wild and desolate and forbidding – so much so that I would not at all be surprised if the end of the world, of the universe, even, actually turned out to be located somewhere beyond that gloomy curtain of the tempest, and those

myriad processions of foaming waves.

A short while later, I arrive in Nelson, a tiny town situated near the mouth of the river. It is so small, in fact, that one can hardly speak of arriving there. A few modest houses, a bridge, a few more houses, a couple of side roads, a maple tree with lovely, lime-green leaves – that is all. The location is excellent, though. The natural waterway created by the broad and calm Glenelg River penetrates far, far into the forested hinterland.

Nelson is named after the *Lady Nelson*, the same ship I mentioned when speaking of the history of the Great Ocean Road area, and of the pioneering explorations performed by Lieutenant James Grant and his crew in the year of 1800. However, what I first and foremost think of when I hear the name of Nelson is of course that famous English vice admiral and war hero, Horatio Lord Nelson. I am sure the founders of Nelson also thought of him when naming their town. After all, in 1852 only 47 years had elapsed since the epic and decisive battle of Trafalgar, on the 21st of October 1805, in which Nelson was martyred, and in which he saved Old England from the menace of French revolutionism.

Those who gave the settlement such a venerable name probably had great ambitions for the place. Perhaps they envisioned a beautiful, prosperous city at this mouth of the river for their children or grand children. Yet the Lord willed it otherwise. Call it fate if you want. In any case, places such as Nelson are poignant testaments to the fragility of human hopes.

There are many such places in Australia and North America, and in other lands once colonized by hopeful and intrepid Europeans. Many of our forefathers had such grand visions for human existence, such lofty ideals and such elevated aims, that we, their fallen descendants, are barely able to comprehend what their thinking was like. In some cases, they succeeded in manifesting those visions and ideals in our physical reality. In other cases, the magnificent names they employed stand as abandoned tombstones at the sites they once trod, lamenting that which never came about. I have been to some of these

places. One can feel the heart ache that encloses them – the heart ache of the dust of the dead.

The Glenelg River, on the other hand, is named after Colonial Secretary Baron Glenelg, Charles Grant, perhaps a relation of Lieutenant James Grant. It is one of the longest rivers in Victoria, and has its origins in the Grampian Mountains. I would have liked to visit those mountains, but they are quite far away from the coast, and do not seem extraordinary enough to warrant such a significant detour.

Unsurprisingly, perhaps, both Glenelg and the Grampian Mountains are also places in the British Isles – in this case in Scotland. Once again, we see how the settlers in a manner transplanted the geography of their beloved native land to their new possession on the other side of the world, transforming an alien and hostile land into a place reminding them of the home to which they would never be able to return.

As the road leaves the Nelson area, I cross the state border and enter South Australia – a fact to which I have been alerted by several signs and warnings. I am, for instance, reminded that it is illegal to bring fresh fruit or fresh vegetables into this part of South Australia, since doing so could spread the fruit fly and other pests to areas which are now pest free. Fortunately, I spotted and got rid of the one potentially illegal object in the car, an old banana peel in one of the back seats, just in time. There is no manned border control at the moment, but I do not want to break the law.

A few minutes after the border crossing, I turn right and onto a side road leading to Donovan's Landing. This is a quay on the Glenelg River, a few kilometers to the north of Nelson. It turns out to be an idyllic place, sheltered from the surrounding country by the tall, wooded limestone banks of the river, and the river itself is so calm that it looks more like a long, narrow lake than a body of water in motion.

If I had planned for it, I could now have boarded a boat and visited the Princess Margaret Rose Caves by travelling the few kilometers up the river to the bend where they are

located, but since I have not, I continue north by car, first on the Dry Creek Road and then on the Princess Margaret Rose Caves Road.
Apart from leading me towards the caves, this also brings me into the Lower Glenelg National Park. I soon arrive at the visitor's center, which is located quite close to the river, but is surrounded by forest. This is one of the few places in the vicinity of Nelson where there is an official camp site. I consider spending the night there, but one has to pay a rather significant fee in order to put up a tent, and the location of the campsite is not very inspiring. There are no views of the river, and the forest of young eucalyptus trees has a rather drab, dry look to it.

Once I have had a walk in the area, I decide to return to the car and continue on in the direction of Mount Gambier, the one major town in the south-eastern part of South Australia. The Princess Margaret Rose Caves can only be visited by tourists in conjunction with a guided tour, and there is no such tour until later in the afternoon. Moreover, the tours cost a significant amount of money, and I have seen a number of similar caves before.

Mount Gambier's main claim to fame is the extinct volcano of the same name, which presently holds two roundish lakes, one of which takes on a deep blue color in summer. The mountain, which is really a large hill, with a maximum height of only 190 meters, was first spotted and named by the aforementioned Lieutenant James Grant, who named it after Lord James Gambier, Admiral of the Fleet in the Royal Navy.

The fact that Lieutenant Grant was able to see this hill, which is many kilometers from the sea, from the Lady Nelson, illustrates just how flat the surrounding land is, and it is indeed as flat as a pancake – if one disregards a few low knolls. To someone who is used to the varied topography of places like Norway, such flatness is almost unbearable. Fortunately, I will not have to put up with it for very long.

As a town, Mount Gambier is certainly not among the worst, but when compared to places like Port Fairy, Lorne or even Geelong, it has little to recommend it. Granted, it

does retain a few lovely historic buildings, such as the city hall, but they are, for the most part, like tiny islands in a sea of disorder and unsightly modernity. Dr. David Kilner puts it well:

”What might have been made of the City’s heritage if some far-sighted City Father or Mother had been in charge of the place 40 years ago can only be imagined. It is now far too late. Around the railway line and along the inner part of Bay Rd, it is almost as if someone has deliberately set out to create architectural and planning chaos. Yes, change is inevitable – but surely it could be handled better than it has been in Mt Gambier?

The redeeming features of all this (from a heritage viewpoint) are a small area in the Centre around the old Town Hall, and a considerable legacy of Victorian and Federation homes, with some splendid specimens on Bay Rd. The Church Hill area is also substantially intact, with examples of old buildings recycled to modern use. (…)

The best hope for the town is serious pedestrianisation of the centre and a re-think about future development. Of course, there are exceptions in regard to the more recent architecture – for example, Chapman Herbert Architects have created some intriguing developments which are keenly aware of their historical, cultural and environmental heritage. To quote Mr. Herbert: ‘The urban centres [of the South East] will continue to follow the commercially and economically based path of destruction, with possibly a few isolated gems of architecture pushing through the mulch.’”

Hence, I soon grow restless, and again decide to move on – even though it is now quite late in the day. My goal will now be Millicent, a small town around 50 kilometers to the west of Mount Gambier. There I will have to find a place to stay for the night.

I am awarded with a pleasant final drive in the warm glow of a clear setting sun. There are no particularly memorable sights on this leg of the journey, only a succession of green fields and glistening trees. That is fine for now, though. I know that there are great experiences waiting for me further ahead, in Adelaide and on the Nullabor Plain.

In Millicent, a most unremarkable town where the center consists of only two streets, I eventually get a motel room at the Somerset Hotel, which is a hotel only in the sense that it is a pub with some accommodation. The rooms are terribly small, and very basic, but at least they are cheap – I pay around sixty Australian dollars – and they are not in the same building as the pub.

I have only just begun to settle in and relax when I am startled into an upright state by some very loud and outlandishly raucous talk just outside the wall that separates my room from the parking lot at the back of the pub. I move over to the window and peer out from an opening between the curtains. It turns out that a company of bus drivers has arrived on the scene, and they are unbelievably rowdy. It is no exaggeration to say that I have never heard such a coarse, foul way of speaking English in my entire life. Is it some kind of cockney? Whatever it is, it is absolutely horrible to listen to.

Thankfully, I have some excellent ear plugs. By using these for the remainder of the evening, and by watching television for a couple of hours, I manage to fall asleep in spite of the disturbances. It also helps that most of the bus drivers move over to the pub.

September 17

The morning thereafter, I awake to a stunningly clear and blue sky. Gone are the clouds and the wind of yesterday – now there is only the firmament and the beaming sun above, and the illuminated, undiscovered country below.

In such conditions, even a mediocre little town like Millicent looks rather appealing. Nevertheless, I do not stay for very long. As soon as I have completed my errands in the grocery store and the pharmacy, I continue my journey into South Australia, choosing the B101, a minor road called the Southern Ports Highway, instead of the B1, the Princes Highway, since the former is the road that will allow me to travel the closest to the

coastline.

For the next hour or so, I move through a rather pretty landscape of open plains and low, undulating hills, covered by pastures of a wonderful, spring green color, and here and there sprinkled with isolated eucalyptus trees. Moreover, the shrubs along the road are nearly all awash with yellow spring flowers.

Unfortunately, I manage to bypass Beachport, which I have since learned is a lovely little holiday town, right by the sea. Luckily, I have decided to visit Robe, which has a similar location, and which is the only town of any significance on the long coastline between Millicent and the Adelaide region.

Upon entering Robe, I decide to replenish my supply of gas at the local Caltex station. However, in a fit of forgetfulness, I enter the station having the wrong side of the car towards the pump. I end up moving about quite a lot before I get it right. I have still not gotten completely used to having a car made for the left side of the road.

My next concern is, as usual, to find reasonably priced accommodation. This time I am lucky. At the beginning of the town center, I spot a motel with an unusually inviting look. The main building has walls of light-coloured stone, and in the small garden between the motel and the street stands a large weeping willow, partly hiding the façade.

The motel is named after the bay immediately to the north of Robe, Guichen Bay. Actually, the motel also has a restaurant. The latter, which is located in the part of the building facing the street, is a very charming place, with a dark, brown timber interior, and, lo and behold, a fireplace. The motel rooms are in a separate building at the back, away from the main street, with entrances facing the parking lot. Even there, the environment is made attractive by the presence of flowers and trees.

At the reception, which is located inside the restaurant, I am greeted by a very friendly elderly lady. Both she and the surroundings make me think of Merry England. This,

combined with the comparatively reasonable price of seventy dollars per night, makes it an easy task to persuade me to make a booking.

With the question of accommodation settled, I am ready to strike out and explore the town. Since the motel is in the town center, and facing the main street, Victoria Street, I decide to leave the car where it is – outside my room – and walk.

I soon come to the conclusion that Robe is the nicest small town I have seen on this journey since Lorne. Named after the fourth Governor of South Australia, Major Frederick Robe, who chose the location because of its suitability as a port in 1847, it is one of the oldest towns in South Australia. Age does not necessarily mean much today, however, since so many towns have been ruined by the architectural vandalism carried out by modernists and postmodernists, but in the case of Robe, there is a remarkable number of well-preserved historic buildings, and an equally remarkable absence of those hideous modern intrusions that have become so common elsewhere. The only town I have seen that is more than its match architecturally is Port Fairy, but Robe, as I will soon find out, has nicer surroundings, as it is located near the tip of an attractive, westward-facing headland, and only a short walk from the long, sandy beaches in Guichen Bay.

Among the several venerable old buildings that delight my modernism-weary eyes, I especially notice the Bank House, since it has a blue plaque. It states that "this fine Italianate building, stone with stucco masonry, was designed by Edmund Wright (1824–1888), the architect for some prominent buildings in Adelaide (…)" and that "It was built in 1859 for the Bank of South Australia (…). Like most of the other historic buildings, it has a warm, light yellow color, which, unlike the gray, brown and black of so many postmodern structures, makes for a very pleasant and uplifting environment.

On my way back, I return via Victoria Street, Robe's main commercial street. Here I am immediately struck by the sight of the Caledonian Inn, a pub, restaurant and hotel from the late 1850s. It is housed in a conspicuously long, two-story building, with tall, slender windows and, once again, a façade of beautiful, light-colored stone.

As many will know, Caledonia was the Roman name for what we now call Scotland, so one would expect an establishment named Caledonian to have some sort of link with Northern Britain. This is indeed the case, for “Callie”, as the locals call it, was built by Peter McQueen, a Scotsman.

A few hours later, when the skies have clouded over, and the increasing darkness is accompanied by light rain, I decide to drive out to the tip of the headland, which I have still not visited. On my way there, I pass the lighthouse, which is a modern and not very interesting construction. The tip of the peninsula turns out to be a delightful place, though. It consists of low and jagged limestone cliffs, and even in the twilight and the rain, it is clear that it provides an excellent vantage point. On very clear days, one should be able to see much of the coast between Robe and Adelaide from here. Now it is a quiet, mysterious, melancholic place. I decide to visit it again in daylight.

September 18

The following morning I check out and leave the motel without having decided if I should stay another night or not. It being early spring, there are plenty of rooms available, and I prefer to have the freedom to go wherever the roads take me instead of having to return to the same place because of a booking. It is a beautiful day, and I expect to spend most of it outdoors or on the road.

I begin by returning to the promontory. What difference sunlight makes! The craggy tip now affords me with a fantastic view of seemingly endless expanses of blue and glittering sea to the west and the north. I am also able to take in the very long coastline to the north of Robe, which appears to consist almost exclusively of sandy beaches, dunes and low hills. It is enveloped in a light ocean mist, created not by fog but by the breaking of the waves, and the mist, which is illuminated by the overhead sun, lends the coastline a silvery, translucent, dreamlike look. On and on it goes, for miles and miles, until it fades

into invisibility, into the place where heaven and earth merge.

It would not have been difficult for me, fond of the sea as I am, to remain on that promontory for much of the day, but after a while, I recall that I am not done exploring the vicinity of Robe. Hence, I leave and drive into the area to the south of the city centre. It is mainly residential, but while visiting one of the B&Bs there, I notice that there is a road called Beacon Hill. That must mean a lookout!

Where the Beacon Hill road ends in a loop, there is indeed a hill, albeit very, very small. It is covered in trees, but there appears to be a structure of stone behind them. What is it? It looks old.

What delights me even more, however, is the sight of dozens of yellow primrose flowers at the foot of the hill, which is shaded by the trees and covered in fresh, green grass. I have not seen such a profusion of primrose flowers since walking along the esplanade in Geelong.

The stone structure turns out to be a little tower built for Robe's 150th jubilee. It is perhaps four meters in height, has a façade of light-colored limestone, and a staircase leading up to a viewing platform. From that platform, I get a 360-degree panoramic view of Robe and its surroundings. It is far from spectacular, as the landscape is exceedingly flat, and, apart from where Robe and the headland and the coast are located, rather monotonous. I was not expecting anything else, though, not having seen any mountains of significance since I was on the Great Ocean Road.

Since there are still several hours of daylight left, I decide to check out the area to the north of the town, around Guichen Bay. Hence, I return to the B101 and drive northwards, in the direction of Cape Jaffa.

The landscape around the road consists mainly of rather monotonous farmland, so I soon decide to take a look at some of the unsealed roads leading towards the Guichen Bay

instead. I am rewarded with a rare animal encounter. As I drive down one of the dirt roads, with a cloud of brown dust tailing the car, I suddenly spot something moving towards the ditch. It is a strange, greyish little thing which looks like it is covered in long, stiff hair. I soon realize that it is an echidna, the Australian hedgehog. When I leave the car and run towards it, it stops moving and curls itself into a ball. What a cute little animal! I stand beside it for a few minutes, waiting to see if anything will happen, but it remains a ball of long spines, so I continue on to the beach and spend some time there.

Towards the end of the day, after sundown, I again go for a walk in the town centre. I am not planning to spend any money in pubs or restaurants, but it is nevertheless enjoyable to take a look at life in Robe as it is in the evening. There is a calm, balmy atmosphere, and I stroll down Victoria Street in a relaxed and contented state of mind. The place seems very safe and orderly. Here and there are the warm, gleaming lights coming from the windows of cafes and restaurants – aside from them the area is quite dimly lit, yet I feel safer here than I would in my home town in Norway, where unbridled immigration has made the kind of safety I sense here in Robe a thing of the past.

After a while I find myself in Mundy Terrace, the oceanfront continuation of Victoria Street. It is lined by a row of large conifers, similar to the ones I noticed in Port Fairy. Beyond them, somewhere in the deep night which now encloses this tiny haven of civilization, the sea is roaring. I am both comforted and disquieted by that, for where I am is shelter and security, but out there, not far away, untamed nature continues her ancient dance.

September 19

On this third day in Robe, I have my eyes, or rather my awareness, set on Adelaide. For that venerable old city should be the next major experience on my journey across the Island Continent. Founded in 1836 and named after Adelaide of Saxe-Meiningen (a duchy in Germany), queen consort to King William IV, it promises to be one of the most

beautiful of the larger cities in Australia, as it did not come into being randomly, but was built according to a plan designed by a certain Colonel William Light.

With that expectation of something pleasing and interesting in the back of my mind, I commence my journey towards the South Australian capital. As is by now standard procedure on this trip, I attempt to stay as close to the sea as the need to remain on paved roads will permit. Accordingly, where the B101 ends, right after the wineries of Cape Jaffa, I choose the B1, the road hugging the coastline, instead of driving east and onto the main highway.

This time, however, the proximity to the ocean does not render the journey particularly interesting. On the contrary, the drive from Kingston to Wellington on the B1 turns out to be one of the dullest hitherto encountered. One reason for that, which of course cannot be blamed on the location, is the completely overcast skies, but the main issue is the tremendous evenness of the land, which causes the sea to be well nigh invisible from the car, even when it is only a hundred meters or so away. Without really noticing, I pass by Coorong National Park, and the lakes Albert and Alexandrina, the latter of which is actually, as I would later learn, a significant location historically, as it was there that Captain Charles Sturt's Murray River Expedition reached its successful conclusion, and also where Captain Collett Barker was killed by Australian blacks while surveying the area where Lake Alexandrina and the Murray River meets the sea.

I then come onto the A1, which soon becomes the M1. It is while I am on this westbound highway, and headed towards Mount Barker – a location only known to me because it is prominent on the map – that the landscape in front of me quite suddenly and unexpectedly morphs into one of rolling grasslands and low, wooded mountains, and I am presented with my first impression of the Adelaide Hills – a region I will later remember as one of the most picturesque and inviting in all of Australia. As the rounded, dark green eminences in front of me gradually increase in height and extent, here and there revealing verdant farmlands, rays of light from scattered openings in the carpet of clouds make parts of the intriguing prospect gleam quietly with that enchanting brilliance

which sunlit foliage is seen as having when surrounded by shadows. It is as if this new and surprisingly beautiful part of South Australia is subtly greeting me and welcoming me, and it is with a substantially elevated spirit that I cruise towards the summit of Mount Barker, and the town by the same name.

Upon entering the town just mentioned, which I remember as being a pleasant place, set in the midst of a forest, and surrounded by hills, I decide that I would like to explore this lovely hill country a bit more before entering the city of Adelaide. Moreover, it is getting fairly late in the afternoon, and I am somewhat intimidated by the thought of arriving in a large city, driving a car, when there is only one or two hours of daylight left. Hence, after refuelling at the local gas station, I turn onto the B37 and drive southwards, in the direction of Strathalbyn and Victor Harbor.

As I drive past the former, I notice a number of buildings made of bricks of a lovely, light yellowish color, and of obvious aesthetical and historical interest, but as the sun is setting, and I have already, enamoured as I am with the sea, concluded that I would prefer to spend the night in Victor Harbor, I continue on without exploring Strathalbyn more closely – perhaps not the wisest decision.

As the darkness starts falling, I make a couple of mistakes in the Goolwa area concerning the choice of roads, but after consulting the road atlas, I finally locate the Flagstaff Hill Road, which first takes me up and then down a startlingly steep hill, and then straight down to the coast, where I easily find my way to the town I have made my goal for the day.

After the usual search for a good accommodation deal, this time after sunset, I choose one of the tiny, but beach-facing “studio” cabins at the NRMA Victor Harbor Beachfront Holiday Park. Then, once I have finished moving my luggage inside, I go for a leisurely little walk nearby, having been tempted to leave the comfort of the cabin by the proximity to and the sound of the sea. Beyond the artificially lit, green lawns of the camping, in the dark, but warm and starry Australian night, the invisible ocean is roaring and thundering

as it encounters the Island Continent. It is a night which at first fills me with a feeling of foreboding and loneliness, but then with an even stronger sense of enchantment and adventure.

Ten years ago, in 2002, I encountered the magic of this maritime Australian night for the very first time, while on a road trip with an Italian friend of mine, Mihran Rovelli, in Northern Queensland. Now a decade has gone by, but the almost impenetrable blackness, the warm breeze and the distant, but mighty breaking of innumerable hidden waves cause the same exhilaration and excitement in my mind as it did back then.

In a hundred years, this night – this black, but balmy Australian night – will still be just as it is now, but I shall have crossed the bar, as Alfred Lord Tennyson puts it, and, hopefully, shall have passed on into that eternity which so much in nature – including this roaring of the unseen ocean at the southern edge of Terra Australis – seems to hint at and point to.

A hundred years ago, another Island Nation, that of Great Britain – then still deserving of that name – was yet dispatching ships to every corner of the globe, across every ocean of the world – ships commanded by men of great courage, and sometimes of equally great visions for the future. In nights just like this present one, huge sails and tall masts and oaken hulls glided quietly and almost invisibly along the hidden wilds of unknown lands – lands such as the Fleurieau Peninsula, where I now stand. They never could have imagined that their descendants, only a few decades later, would hurriedly abandon all the precious fruits of their appalling toils and their tremendous sacrifices, and, as if in a fit of panic, dissolve the greatest European empire since Rome so thoroughly that almost everyone except professional historians and decrepit old men have forgotten its existence, its achievements and its magnificence.

What happened to you, Britannia? What caused your fatal loss of heart? That is one of the great mysteries of the twentieth century – not because it is inexplicable, but because great efforts have been made to conceal the clues and prevent the reflections which would

enable the intelligent observer to gain a true understanding of those disastrous events.

September 20

The morning thereafter I awake to a splendid, almost cloudless weather. The shallow water in the bay between the town and Granite Island is sparkling in the sun and mirroring the blue sky, and the small, distinctive headland to the west of the town, Rosetta Head, is glowing with such lovely shades of verdant green that it reminds me of certain parts of the coast in Western Ireland. As my car brings me closer to that headland, I notice something I never saw in Ireland, however, namely that the green grass on both the headland and the large adjoining meadows is strewn with pale yellow flowers. They are the same kind of spring flowers I saw in Robe, in the Cumberland River Valley and in Geelong earlier on this trip – pale yellow primroses.

This time, however, there are not only a few dozen or a few hundred such tiny little stars to behold, but thousands upon thousands of them, all gleaming in the sun and quivering in the ocean breeze.

Although these flowers are not, according to some, "native" to Australia, since they have only been here for circa one hundred and fifty years, there is no doubt in my mind, having seen what I have seen, that they constitute an enrichment, and should be allowed to stay. As most of the primeval Australian flowers occur on trees or shrubs, these primroses and other such imported flowers help fill a gap in the Australian flora, and it is difficult to see that they do much harm, while the beauty they add is undeniable to anyone who has seen sights such as Rosetta Head during a well-watered Australian spring.

As the distinctive geography and the surprisingly varied vistas here would seem to convey unspoken promises of, the Rosetta Head area is rich in stirring British and European history. According to J. J. Pascoe, the editor of the book *Adelaide and Vicinity*, it was of this part of Australia that the aforementioned Captain Sturt, regretting the

necessity of having to depart from it, “recorded that his eye never fell on country of a more promising aspect (…).” (Pascoe, 1901, p. 10) At that time, the land must of course have had a more virgin and heavily wooded appearance, but I think most visitors to this region would agree with Captain Sturt’s estimation of it even now, almost two centuries later. Like it or not, that says not a little of the quality of European stewardship during those two hundred years.

It was also in a location not that distant from the present one – I mean Cape Jervis, on the westernmost part of the peninsula – that the above mentioned Captain Collett Barker began his expedition – the one which would end with his untimely fate near the mouth of the Murray River. In April 1831, as Pascoe recounts, Captain Barker “arrived, made his way to the hills, and described delightful scenery and well-grassed country. He beheld a magnificent panorama from the top of Mount Lofty, where no white man had ever stood, and over the rich open plain to the north-west viewed an indentation in the coast of the Gulf, which became the port of the City of Adelaide.” (Pascoe, 1901, p. 11)

Decades before that, however, in April 1802, the bay I just drove past, Encounter Bay, was so named by that surveyor of immortal fame and bravery, Matthew Flinders, as that was where he, while on the H. M. S. “Investigator”, encountered the French ship M. F. “Le Geographe”, and the intrepid French discoverer Captain Nicolas Baudin. According to the 1902 plaque which commemorated the event, the meeting between these two exceptional men took place on April 8, not very far from Rosetta Head.

Here it also seems appropriate to consider the strange and tragic fate suffered by Matthew Flinders after his voyage along the South Australian coast, movingly described by Pascoe. Upon his arrival in Port Jackson – today better known as Sydney Harbour – the H. M. S. “Investigator” was so worn-out that it was declared unfit for further service. Hence, Flinders was eventually forced to attempt to sail all the way back to England, his home, on “a colonial cutter, the Cumberland, of 29 tons.” (Pascoe, 1901, p. 7)

“The frail craft might be safe enough for river and light coastal work, but he must be

courageous who would seek to navigate it to the northern hemisphere. Even this great exploit Flinders might have accomplished had the French not arrested him in Mauritius for being without a passport. For six years he was immured in a small island prison, and was not liberated until 1810, when Mauritius capitulated to the English. On July 14, 1814, the great navigator died, but in Australia his memory will be perpetuated as long as the language lasts.

Such is, in part, the story of the first forerunner of South Australian settlement, which deals with a great man and a hero who rendered inestimable service to his country, who deserved a better fate than he received, and to whom posterity owes a debt of gratitude it can never repay."

The lives of men such as Flinders also help us see through present-day anti-European propaganda, and reminds us that most of these fathers and ancestors of ours, far from being the one-dimensional caricatures Marxist subversives have portrayed them as, were in fact human beings like ourselves, just as capable of experiencing emotions as we are, and just as vulnerable as us to suffering and death, who, in spite of that, managed to do the most marvellous deeds – deeds from which we still benefit.

Finally, it is also fitting to note that Rosetta Head was named after the wife of G. F. Angas – one of the men who played an absolutely indispensable role in the founding and development of Adelaide and South Australia. In 1835, for example, when it looked as if South Australia might never come into being, "'one of the Commissioners, Mr. George Fife Angas, a wealthy merchant, who had for some years been quietly working in the interests of the proposed new colony, came forward as leader of the forlorn hope, brought forward and carried into effect a scheme, without which the colonisation of South Australia under the conditions of the Act of Parliament would have been utterly impossible.'" (Pascoe, 1901, p. 22)

A little further on, Pascoe adds that "of the incessant workers in the local cause, Mr. Gouger, Colonel Torrens, and Mr. G. F. Angas are the principal. To them, in all

probability, the Province owes its existence. First, Gouger was persistent and restless; then Torrens labored strenuously as well with the pen as in Parliament and among his friends; and lastly, Angas, with uncommon enterprise and foresight, stepped forth at a time when the outlook was most gloomy and disheartening, and initiated the series of events which finally launched the enterprise. The last placed his wealth in the balance, formulated the scheme which enabled the Commissioners to fulfill the demands of the Act, and anxiously toiled, even after the Province was proclaimed. That his remarkable faith and indomitable energy should bear abundant fruit was a just reward. In after years he invested a large amount of capital in South Australia, came here to reside, and here he died." (Pascoe, 1901, p. 24)

As the passages quoted above hopefully help illustrate, the creation of a colony was, in many cases, anything but the theft of land it has lately been portrayed as. In the case of South Australia, it was in fact the rather slow, exceedingly difficult and truly astounding transformation of what was largely an inhospitable wilderness – one in which none of the readers of this book would have been likely to survive for more than a few weeks – into a civilized, pleasant and productive land. An impressive example of what this transformation entailed is that South Australia was exporting wheat to other Australian provinces within six years from its proclamation as a colony (Pascoe, 1901, p. 24).

Most of us who live who live today, however, have never had to engage in the kinds of mental and physical struggles that made such transformations possible – we may unthinkingly enjoy the outcome, without even realizing that it is precisely an *outcome* – and so, we easily forget how grateful and amazed we actually ought to be.

It is also worth noting that South Australia, contrary to the impressions sometimes created by modern oversimplifications of history, did not begin its life as a settlement of convicts. Instead, the colony was based on voluntary immigration, and on the other principles elaborated by Edward Gibbon Wakefield. Of the importance of the new scheme for colonization developed by Wakefield, Pascoe states that "In comparison with Western Australia, which remained for half a century in pitiful indigence, the Province

was a brilliant success – and it was not to the quality of soil that the difference must be imputed. To the productions of Wakefield's penetrating mind many South Australians must ascribe their opulence and contentment."

In order to reach my next goal, the westernmost part of the Fleurieau Peninsula, I take the B37, also called the Range Road, aiming for Cape Jervis, which, on the map, looks as if it might provide some good places from which to view the surrounding coastline.

As I drive westwards, along the crests of the gently undulating hills, I somewhat unexpectedly enter a blanket of thick fog. When I continue into its grey and chilly depths, the wild gum trees and the empty road repeatedly combine to form a vista akin to that of an aged tree-lined avenue, vanishing into the mist. Here and there, however, the blanket of grey is less dense, and I am able to see far into the maze of partly grass-covered and partly wooded hills that comprises much of the interior of the Fleurieau Peninsula. In a few places in the distance, light green meadows and unassuming, rather ancient-looking farmsteads add interest and intrigue to the panoramas, but the main impression is that of forests – vast, lush forests – some of which appear almost untouched by human hands.

A while later, the landscape opens up and flattens out, and at the end of a long slope, I arrive at the point where a ferry departs Cape Jervis for Kangaroo Island. There is not much to see in the area surrounding the ferry key, however, so I almost immediately turn the car around and drive a few hundred meters back, to the beginning of the slope, where I noticed an unnamed, but seemingly promising gravel road.

My inkling regarding the unsealed road turns out to be correct. After crossing a small hill, the road leads down to a secluded, sandy beach, beyond which steep hills and even mighty cliffs boldly challenge the grim, but subtly scintillating ocean waves. The fog, which is much less dense here than it was farther inland, but which thickens into a gloomy, almost opaque mass at the summit of the cliffs, lends the scene a strange and mysterious, almost otherworldly flavour. For a place such as this – the westernmost point of the wonderful and enigmatic peninsula that is the Fleurieau – that seems just as it

should be.

Having had a memorable stop at Morgan's Beach, I head north until I reach the area called Second Valley. There, to my great surprise, the evergreen forest suddenly reveals a very European-looking building – a lovely little structure made of light-colored masonry, with a disproportionately tall chimney at the back. I later learn that this was once a mill, built in 1858 to process wheat flour. However, even without an awareness of that venerable history, the sheer presence of such a charming, civilized edifice, surrounded by lush greenery, and the absence of any modern intrusions except the paved road I am driving on, instil in me a peculiar sense of peace and comfort, and of having gone back in time – back to something which was well worth having, but which no longer exists – something akin to the Shire in the Lord of the Rings, perhaps. Nevertheless, in regions such as the Adelaide Hills and the Fleurieau, a taste of that calmer and more stationary way of life may still be had. Here, it is still possible to seek out and settle in secluded, leafy vales where the horrors of this late, degenerate Modernity may be almost – if not quite – buried beneath the joy called forth by the living of one's life as it ought to be lived.

I allow myself another detour, this time to the Second Valley Jetty, where a cheerful band of anglers are readying their fishing gear. Here, in the delightfully shady parking area, I rest a little while outside the car. However, as enough fog remains in the air for the sunlight to be greatly obscured, and I am eager to reach the outskirts of Adelaide, I do not linger very long, but soon drive on, continuing north on the B23.

It is with some reluctance and regret that I put the hills and the valleys and the woods of the Fleurieau peninsula behind me, though. Somewhat unexpectedly, I have come across the kind of place where, if I had known beforehand just how enchanting it would be, I would have spent at least one whole day.

But such is the life of the explorer – and, to some extent, the life of every human being in this world. On and on we go – always on, until the End. Now and then an extraordinary

confluence of impressions and associations results in a moment we would very much like to extend into the future, yet Time drives us inexorably forward, away from the present and into the unknown, and all we can do is cherish the memory of what we had, and embrace the adventure inherent in entering into that which is yet to be.

This northbound journey gradually takes me away from the soothing presence of the topographically varied and partially wooded lands of the south, and into a country which is strikingly open and windswept and bare. Upon reaching the settlement called Sellicks Beach, where a strong westerly wind is blowing, I have at last clearly put the great blanket of fog behind me, and, for the first time since leaving Rosetta Head, I am able to enjoy the sight of blue skies, and the warmth of an unimpeded Australian sun. Gazing southwards from a vantage point near the beach, I am able to examine the northern outskirts of that vast carpet of mist, as well as the much of the coastline of the peninsula. It is a sublime sight, and one of the more memorable moments of the journey so far. But Adelaide is waiting for me, and so, I soon move on.

As before, I attempt to stay in the vicinity of the coastline, but, as time is also a concern, I choose to follow the A15 highway instead of the lesser seaside roads. With that decided, I quickly close in on the outskirts of the city, aiming for the seaside suburb of Glenelg. As I do so, I am treated to sweeping views of the mainly flat, but nevertheless somewhat undulating country extending northwards in front of me. The prospect is inviting – the land looks fertile, and the built environments appear clean and orderly. I do not pay very much attention to precisely where I am when I get these views, though. I am too excited – I am, after all, about to enter the largest city I have been to since Melbourne!

The traffic on the A15 gradually increases, and when I, after an hour or so, find myself in the southern part of Glenelg, it has almost come to a halt. I slowly continue northwards, wondering what the native Australian drivers in the cars surrounding me are thinking. None of the other cars in sight have the bright orange color mine has, and I see none from the state of Victoria. Are they able to tell that I remain slightly uncomfortable with being on the left side of the road? I hope not.

Fortunately, I reach a side road on the left called Broadway before the traffic gets even worse. It is a fairly short road, running between the A15 and the beach, and somewhere along that street, not very far away, a map in a brochure indicates that there is a place where I might be able to spend the night for a relatively small amount of money – the Norfolk Motor Inn. I have seen enough for one day, and the sun is beginning to set. The rest of the city can wait till the morrow.

I find the motel at the intersection between Broadway and Partridge Street. There is nothing very extraordinary about it, but the rooms are clean and reasonably priced, and, to my relief, somewhat sheltered from the traffic on the above mentioned roads.

September 21

This day I still remember now, seven years later, as one of the most beautiful of all the days of this blessed journey across the Great Southern Land. It is not so much about specific sights or experiences as about a general impression, a persistent ambience, an overarching sentiment. From the moment I leave the motel room, and throughout the remainder of this day, the sky is a crisp and cloudless blue, the sun an unfailing abundance of light, and the air a gentle, faultless flow of warmth. It is a day of the kind only Australia has more than a few of in a year – with the exception of the Mediterranean, perhaps – and *in* this glorious spring day, everything is bathed and illuminated and made like new. If the Heavenly Paradise has days, they cannot be altogether different from this September day in Adelaide.

As I drive into the city, I am greeted by myriads of translucent maple leaves, glowing in the light, and further away from the sides of the road, the picture is one of order and tranquillity. Here a fairly pleasant mixture of modern and historic buildings meets the eye – there well-kept parklands bid the weary traveller repose on verdant lawns, below the venerable crowns of aged gums.

Even after seeing only some of the numerous streets comprising the centre of Adelaide, I agree with the high praise accorded to Colonel William Light (1786–1839), the man who, in the crucial early years of 1836 and 1837, chose the location of the future city, and then designed the splendid pattern on which its layout would be based. In the aforementioned book *Adelaide and Vicinity*, Pascoe declares that it was Colonel Light who, "to all intents and purposes, was the designer and founder of the City of Adelaide, and it is fitting that his memory should be cherished while one of its buildings stands. In his work he met with such opposition and discouragement that his days were few in number." (Pascoe, 1901, p. 30)

Some of the instructions given to Colonel Light (as Surveyor-General) by the Colonising Commissioners may surprise many of those who have been exposed to all *the lying by omission* perpetrated by the late modern, and often covertly Marxist, educational system:

"They required that he must first land on Kangaroo Island, and there lay out two or three gardens in order to prove the soil. Next, he must examine those parts of the South Australian coast that were central, and that seemed to possess the advantages of a good harbour. (…) **When going to and fro on his mission he was to exercise the utmost caution in his dealings with the natives so as to prevent collision. Wild animals were to be considered the peculiar property of the aborigines, and when any were needed for food they were to be purchased. Sporting in country inhabited by natives was prohibited.** Then, 'when you have determined the site of the first town, you (…) will make the streets of ample width, and arrange them with reference to the convenience of the inhabitants, and the beauty and salubrity of the town; and you will make the necessary reserves for squares, public walks, and quays.'" (Pascoe, 1901, p. 30, emphasis added)

When the Province of South Australia was officially proclaimed on December 28, 1836, in what was then called Holdfast Bay, but which is now better known as Glenelg, Colonel Light was not present (Pascoe, 1901, p. 36):

"He had pitched his tent on the River Torrens, where he proposed to lay out the town, and

each day he went to and fro inspecting the land. Mr. Kingston, the Deputy Surveyor-General, lived in an adjoining tent, and assisted in the work. On December 29, Governor Hindmarsh went inland and visited Colonel Light on the Torrens, and expressed his sense of the beauty of the locality, but considered that it was 'too far from the harbour' for the purposes of the capital. He then inspected the harbour chosen by Colonel Light (Port Adelaide), and declared that there the city should be built. Colonel Light pointed out that the river overflowed its banks at the place indicated by the Governor, and a disagreement arose between the two authorities, for Colonel Light persisted in adhering to his own choice." (Pascoe, 1901, p. 36)

In spite of this, "Governor Hindmarsh seems to have been secretly enamored with the attractions and certain of the recommendations of Adelaide. In a letter written from the Buffalo on January 5, 1837, to Mr. G. F. Angas, he says: 'Adelaide is to be on the bank of a beautiful stream, with thousands of acres of the richest land I ever saw. Altogether, a more beautiful spot can hardly be imagined.' With this opinion many travellers have since agreed. (Pascoe, 1901, p. 37)

"In the meantime, Colonel Light and his assistants had been surveying and staking off the town acres. They began this work on January 11, 1837, and completed it on March 10 following. Colonel Light prepared the plans for the streets and squares and terraces; and none will deny that he did his work conscientiously and well. After an extended and systematic search, he had chosen a delightful spot, slightly elevated above the surrounding plain. A few miles to the east and south-east were the varied but ever-beautiful range of hills, of which Mount Lofty, almost due east, was the highest eminence. Plains, fertile and occasionally wooded, stretched north and south, and to the sea in the west. Between the town and the harbour there was but little timber. Altogether, the site was a magnificent location for a new town, and the gradients afforded excellent opportunity for drainage. Except for its distance from the harbour, it possessed almost every advantage asked for by the Commissioners in their instructions. The judgment of Colonel Light is now looked upon as beyond reproach, and the present beautiful city is his best monument.

Opinion is unanimous that Adelaide is one of the best-laid-out cities in the Southern Hemisphere, and that its alignment of streets is in artistic sympathy with the delightful panorama presented by the neighbouring country. Colonel Light made the main street to trail down a pretty slope to the river, and the cross streets to run east and west, so as to afford for all time vistas through which the noble background of hills might be viewed. All the streets were at right angles. Near each corner of the city area south of the river a square was reserved by Colonel Light, and another in the centre – five in all.

The site was so situated that suburban cities without number could be built at every joint of the compass, of dimensions such as no centre could ever require. Three hundred and forty-two acres of the original area lay on the north side of the Torrens, in laying out which advantage was taken of the contour of the ground, and 700 acres on the south. On every side parks 500 yards in width were reserved. Ten acres were reserved as a Government domain in a beautiful position on the river banks, and 200 acres were set apart for the purposes of a botanical garden. Reserves were made for the sites of a hospital, public cemetery. Government stores, schools outside the town, and of public offices close to the central square. Collectively, the general plan provided all that was necessary for an imposing city to be built upon." (Pascoe, 1901, p. 40)

A few pages later, Pascoe continues:

"Colonel Light did not long survive. He was already in the incipient stages of consumption, and his vexations, and, also, no doubt, the feeling that his public services had not received their due reward, tended to hasten the progress of his malady to a fatal issue. He became associated with a land agency firm under the style of Light, Finniss, and Co., and undertook the survey of Port Adelaide, a work which he; was not able to complete. He gradually sank, and on October 5, 1839, died at the age of 54 years. When on his deathbed he pathetically and anxiously asked to be acknowledged as the founder of Adelaide, and requested that a copper plate, bearing an inscription to that effect, should be laid by his side on the coffin. This simple and fair request was obeyed; and it was a

tardy and modest enough recognition. His funeral was largely attended; public sympathy being all the greater because it was generally considered that he came to an untimely end mainly through the indignities he had endured. He was buried in Light Square, where an obelisk to his memory was erected, bearing the inscription:

Erected by
The Pioneers of South Australia
in memory of
Colonel William Light,
First Surveyor-General,
and by whom
The Site of Adelaide was fixed on
the 29th of December, 1836.
Died 5th of October, 1839,
Aged 54 years."

(Pascoe, 1901, p. 49)

If I were to criticize anything about Adelaide based on my brief stay there, I would mainly take issue with the following: The large and unnecessarily disruptive modern intrusions, and the lack of larger areas consisting of historic stone buildings only – or at least buildings *inspired* by the venerable European traditions. These are, however, issues in almost all modern cities in the West, and on this first day in Adelaide, the joy of being there overshadows the many imperfections of the built environment.

Compared to the City of Sydney, where I lived for almost two years back in 2002 and 2003, I would say that Adelaide, which is significantly smaller, in some ways surpass it, and in other ways fall far short of it.

To speak of the ways in which Sydney outshines Adelaide first, one of the greatest advantages of Sydney is its huge, magnificent and perfectly sheltered natural harbour.

The majesty of the Sydney skyline, particularly when viewed from the sea, is also, in my estimation, unbeatable. When taken in conjunction with the miles and miles of gleaming, sandy beaches to the north and the south, and the opulent eastern suburbs and their golden sandstone cliffs, the picture becomes one which no other city in the world can equal.

However, Sydney has become very, very large, and the western suburbs, between the city centre and the Blue Mountains, are comparatively poor and uninteresting, and suffer, to some extent, from the same kind of depressing urban sprawl which is so common in America. If one, as a city dweller, is desirous of visiting the mountains to the west, one has to embark on a fairly long and tedious train journey, or an even more displeasing journey by bus or car.

Adelaide, on the other hand, has only a negligible natural harbour, and no imposing skyline, and no cliffs to speak of – nor does it have beaches as large or as beautiful as some of those offered by Sydney. The city centre appears much greener than that of Sydney, however – mainly due to Colonel William Light's inspired design – and also calmer and friendlier and less intimidating. Moreover, the wonderful Adelaide Hills, which could be called small mountains, and their quaint and charming hamlets, nestled in vast tracts consisting of an unusually charming mixture of farmlands and forests, are only a short and comfortable drive away from the heart of the city – as we shall soon see. If I were to live in an Australian city for an extended period of time, I would not hesitate to settle in Adelaide.

Having satisfied some of my curiosity as regards the city itself, I drive on in a north-westerly direction, towards the Port. I eventually arrive at the seashore, where I come onto the Esplanade, as it is called. As I follow this minor road towards the north, by way of its numerous small roundabouts, I realize that I have accidentally discovered one of the most beautiful parts of Adelaide. White or cream-colored beaches, flanked by blue, sparkling waters, can easily be seen from the car, and the seashore looks exceptionally clean and tidy, and is equipped with everything one could wish for as regards free

parking, shade-giving trees and various public facilities.

After a while I arrive at the Larg's Pier Hotel, a rather curious, but nevertheless visually appealing three-story hotel building, whose rows of open arches and pale yellow color makes it slightly reminiscent of the famous ruins of Ephesus in what is *now* Turkey. The hotel opened its doors back in 1882 – at a time when Modern European Civilization was still in a highly vital and hopeful phase – and during those final decades of the Victorian Age, it was at this very establishment that many of the European settlers who would go on to make Adelaide successful spent their first nights on dry land since leaving more familiar abodes. Not a few of them would have spent more than *two months* at sea.

Once I have had my fill of sunshine, I turn the car around and calmly make my way back to Glenelg via Military Road. To my relief, the room at Norfolk Motor Inn is still available. I then spend the remaining hours of daylight exploring the central part of Glenelg on foot.

The centre of Glenelg reveals itself to be a pleasant enough place, but, as it only has one rather short street lined with shops – Jetty Road – it is quickly explored, and the architecture housing the shops is an all too modern concatenation of mostly unremarkable and unimaginative buildings. My most memorable initial discovery is that of a pair of rugged Timberland hiking boots, which I quickly decide to buy, as I refrained from bringing any such boots with me from Norway, and I expect they will soon come in handy.

The western part of Jetty Road is the more interesting one. There, a tall monument made of blocks of light-coloured stone memorializes the aforementioned founding of the Province of South Australia, on December 28, 1836. It is a decent tribute to the "pioneer settlers", as they are styled, but the presence of not only a tall flagpole with the Australian flag on the left, but of an equally tall pole with the so-called Aboriginal flag on the right, makes me concerned, as I am again reminded of how the presence of an indigenous community is used by Marxist revolutionaries to undermine and subvert everything

Australians of European extraction have achieved over the last two centuries.

It is interesting, to say the least, that Europeans who emigrate to other parts of the world are not considered fully "native" or "indigenous" even after two or three or even four hundred years, while non-Europeans who emigrate to European countries are made out to be just as "European" as the actual Europeans themselves after only a generation or two – or, in some cases, on their very arrival. That should tell us something about the real purpose of such rhetoric. I am not saying that labels such as "native" or "indigenous" are never justified, but if the so-called aboriginals (who had never thought of themselves as a single group with a single identity when European arrived) are the natives of Australia, then the European nations are certainly the indigenous peoples of Europe – and ought to be treated as such.

September 22

On this second of my mornings in blessed Adelaide, the weather is as wonderfully splendid and uplifting as it was the day before. I once again check out of the Norfolk Motor Inn, not having decided yet whether or not I will return, but this time I do not linger in the city, but head straight for the aforementioned hills, cutting right across the southern part of Adelaide on the A3, and then driving onto the M1, which is the road by which I would have entered the city two days earlier unless I had gone down to Victor Harbour instead. The sky is as perfectly cloudless and the sunlight as faultlessly clear as one could possibly wish for, and the myriads of evergreen leaves on the hundreds and hundreds of lofty gum trees in the vicinity of the highway, lit from behind by the early morning rays, are sparkling and gleaming and glistening.

The shadows soon deepen, and the landscape around me quickly rises to significant heights, as the M1 enters a deep and narrow gorge or dell, and bends, gracefully but quite

sharply, first one way and then the other, meandering its way between two magnificent wooded mountains, and forming one of the most memorable shorter drives I have encountered on the journey so far.

I quickly reach the town of Stirling, which gives the impression of being a wonderfully idyllic place, consisting mainly, it seems, of private, residential properties of a fairly modest appearance, manifestly built with a view to tasteful and agreeable seclusion, with quaint and aged-looking fencing, and delightfully well-kept and orderly courtyards and gardens, and set in a marvellously lush environment, full of all kinds of trees and shrubs, and congenially sheltered by hillocks and ridges. In fact, Stirling is probably the most idyllic small town of its kind – I am thinking of towns in the inland – that I have *ever* had the pleasure of visiting.

I do not linger in Stirling either, however, but take the westbound Sturt Valley Road, since I have decided, or rather *intuited*, that I should aim for Belair National Park. I know nothing about the place, but, judging by the map, it has a promising location, on top of a large elevation to the west of Stirling, not very far from where the hills descend or fall away to the plain where Adelaide is flourishing.

This road, too, takes me through a wonderfully verdant area. It is like exploring a path through the loveliest of woods without having to leave one's car. A while later, I come onto the B28, the Upper Sturt Road, by which I effortlessly reach the main gateway to Belair National Park. There are still trees in all directions, but the landscape is now more open and level.

Once I have paid the entrance fee at the ticket booth, I slowly drive into the park itself on the *Queens Jubilee Road*. It is a wonderful, festive name, which may, I suppose, refer to Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee on the 20th and the 21st of June 1887. However, the bill which established Belair as a national park was not passed until the 19th of December 1891, and as I have been unable to find any reliable information on the history of the Belair road names, it could well be that some other anniversary inspired the appellation in

question.

After only a few hundred meters, the loveliness of the parklands virtually force me to bring the car to a halt and step outside. I am somewhere in the vicinity of the large open space called Gums Oval, and there is absolutely no one around. Everywhere I look, thick carpets of an astonishingly spring green vegetation, mingled with flowers of a bright, peach-like, almost orange color, cover the forest floor, from which rises dozens and dozens of evergreen gum trees with tall, slightly silvery trunks and bundles of round boughs forming large, shade-providing crowns. It is the largest display of spring flowers I have encountered since driving past the incredible primrose meadows on the headlands to the west of Victor Harbour. Whether these flowers are native to Australia or not is far from being a concern of mine. They look as if they might be, and they certainly fit well with the environment in terms of aesthetics.

My second significant memory from Belair this morning is of sitting beside the car in a large, delightfully shady area, sprinkled with flowers of various kinds, and traversed by a small, murmuring rivulet. There is a striking, mysterious birdsong, reminiscent of the one I experienced at Cumberland River Camping near Lorne, and the blending of that birdsong with the mighty sound of a gale, rustling and rushing through the great and lofty boughs overhead, but leaving the parklands below serene, give rise to an unforgettably transcendent and uplifting mood, bordering on an epiphany. For a while, an hour, maybe, there is only, as I memorized shortly thereafter, “the profoundly blue and cloudless Southern sky, and, beneath, the roaring of the wind in the crowns of the evergreen trees” – merging, when I think of it, with the wistful fluting of exotic birds, and calling on the soul, one might be led to deem, to recollect the nature of the world and contemplate the splendour of the unseen realms beyond.

Invigorated by this extraordinarily beautiful morning in what was one of the first national parks in the world, I decide to continue south and explore the hills even further. Of this leg of the journey I cannot now remember very much, except that it was a very pleasant one, and that the landscape, after a while, changed from one consisting mainly of wooded

heights and unpretentious, hidden-away settlements to one embracing surprisingly spacious farmlands, evidently of great fertility. I briefly halt at a roadside store to buy a small car cooler, and then, after a break, decide that I would rather continue on to Victor Harbor than return to Adelaide. I reach my destination a couple of hours or so before the sunset. This time I wind up at the Apollon Motor Inn, an old but reasonably priced and perfectly decent motel, since none of the smaller NRMA beachfront cottages are available. The elderly lady at the curiously constructed, "drive-through" reception area is very friendly, and my somewhat unusual means of transportation elicits the following remark: "Now that is a *hot* car!" The place appears somewhat dated, but the room I get is on the second floor, at the back of the motel, if I remember correctly, and sufficiently sheltered from the traffic on Torrens Street to enable me to get my obligatory eight hours of sleep.

September 23

The day after I quickly leave and take the most direct route to Adelaide possible, the A13, which brings me right into the heart of the city in only an hour or so. As I enter the conurbation of Glenelg, I am thinking of staying another night at the Norfolk Motor Inn, but when that motel turns out to be fully booked, I decide to strike out and continue my journey through the Great Southern Land.

After a bit of fumbling, I manage to locate the A1, on which I quickly leave Adelaide and its blessed hills behind, and enter a vast and arid plain, where only scattered trees and shrubs are able to survive. It is by far the flattest and most desolate prospect I have hitherto come into contact with in Australia, but, like the similar landscapes in the American Midwest, it is not *entirely* devoid of charm. One gets a special sense of freedom and elation when moving through a landscape such as this in one's own vehicle, on an excellent highway with very few annoyances, and the prevailing feeling of the

present moment is that something immense and splendid and revivifying lies in front of me – not only the physical, geographical discoveries I know are likely coming, but something even greater, something *spiritual*, of which this visible magnificence is but a very imperfect *image*.

My goal for the day, I have decided, will be the Yorke Peninsula – the easternmost and smaller of the two huge capes jutting out into the ocean to the west of Adelaide. It was named after Charles Philip Yorke (1764–1834), who later received the glorious title of *First Lord of the Admiralty* (1810–1812). As I leave the A1 and head west on the B85, a range of low hills causes the landscape to rise, and there I encounter the first temporary police check point I have seen on the trip so far. They are conducting Random Breath Testing, checking to see if any drivers have a "blood alcohol content" of 0.05 percent or more.

Fortunately, I have not had so much as a yoghurt that day, so I *should* have nothing to worry about. The test takes only a few seconds, and the officers do not even ask me where I am from or what I am doing in South Australia with that startlingly "hot" rental car from Victoria, so I am soon back on the road again. Quickly thereafter, the landscape flattens out once again, and there is not a great deal to see, but there is the unobstructed sunshine, the blue skies and *the marvellous freedom of the road*.

Minutes later, I close in on Kadina, one of the larger towns on the Yorke, where I quickly spot the surprisingly well-kept and inviting Kadina Gateway Motor Inn. Upon exiting the car, I am greeted by a most friendly elderly lady, who quickly convinces me to book a room. For a motel, the place is a delight, with meticulously manicured beds of flowers, shade-giving gum trees and a little blue pool, and tidy rooms which are all on the ground floor, since there is no second storey. Not only that, I seem to be the only guest around, so there is perfect peace and quiet.

Later in the afternoon, I drive over to the costal town of Wallaroo, which lies only a few kilometers to the west of Kadina, but since the skies have now become somewhat

overcast, and the town is not very visually attractive, I do not linger there for more than a few minutes, and choose instead to have a quiet and relaxing evening at the oasis that is my newfound place of accommodation. Even if Wallaroo had turned out to be more interesting, I would not have had a great deal of time to spend there, as I continue to aim to be in bed before 9 pm, in order to be as certain as possible of getting plenty of sleep before the early rise necessitated by the curious Australian check-out requirements.

September 24

On this date commences one of the most magnificent and memorable days of the trip so far. Due to the Yorke not appearing to hold any particularly great attractions, I decide against making a detour to explore its southernmost part, which would probably have been a pleasant experience, and instead opt to head north, to the area where the southern section of the Flinders Ranges promises a reprieve from the aridity and tedium of the plains.
As I leave Kadina and Wallaroo on the B89, I find myself surrounded by the most North-American landscape I have seen in a very long while – an immense, prairie-like expanse of muted green and rusty brown, interrupted only by a few tiny, scattered houses many miles away, and by some vanishingly slight, pale and bluish hints of hills or low mountains even further away, where the exceedingly distant horizon merges with the sky.

My imagination and my sympathies are soon led to dwell on the poignant prospect of the generations of mainly European pioneers who began cultivating such immense stretches of terrain, here as well as elsewhere in the world, without modern agricultural equipment and machinery, and with none of the late modern amenities we have been conditioned into thinking of as necessary. Before *their* arrival, regions such as these were in fact largely "wastelands" – huge, monotonous expanses where only certain types of shrubs and grasses thrived, only capable of supporting a few nomadic or semi-nomadic hunter-gatherers, and barely even that. People who have lived their entire lives in smaller and far more varied environments, such as the English shires, or in a city, cannot fully appreciate

what these places were actually like.

How did they manage to persevere? The backbreaking physical work, inside as well as outside of the home, formed only one aspect of their struggle, and was, undoubtedly, as nothing when compared to the *spiritual* struggle. Even I, who have been infatuated with nature, and a lover of solitude, for as long as I can remember, struggle to fathom their endurance. To embark on journeys and on projects such as they embarked on, and not merely occasionally, but again and again and again, and by the thousands, and the hundreds of thousands, and even by the millions – that requires a mental strength and a clarity of vision which very few of those alive today would be able to muster.

Those departed members of our vast and ancient family – and I say "our" consciously, being myself a member of the Great River of European Civilization, genetically as well as spiritually – achieved *miracles*. They virtually *terraformed* entire sections of the globe, for when they set out on their migrations, the continents beyond Eurasia were almost as inhospitable and inaccessible as other planets are now. Yet they are no longer given the honour they in truth deserve. That is not only profoundly unjust – it also puts the survival of everything bequeathed to us and enjoyed by us at risk. For how can nations which depreciate the heroes of the past expect new ones to arise when needed? And how can nations which cease to appreciate the value of their possessions, because they loose the awareness of the gruelling efforts it took to obtain them, hope to escape disenfranchisement and ruin?

A little while later, I pass by the Port Broughton area, where I catch inviting glimpses of sandy beaches and scintillating, cerulean water. I do not linger, however, but press on, and soon pass through Port Pirie – a town of a beautiful name, but dominated by heavy industry – on the outskirts of which I again propel my vehicle onto the northbound lane of the A1.

To my right, the lofty, partly forested hills of the Flinders Ranges are now clearly visible, for the first time on the trip. Then, some 30 kilometers on, the tallest and most abundantly

wooded section of the range adjoining Spencer Gulf, culminating in the delicate, yet prominent little peak deservedly styled Mount Remarkable, comes into view. Although the mountain is not particularly tall, at least not by European standards, the sight of it makes quite an impression on me, and even now, a number of years later, remembering its striking name evokes some of the most exhilarating of all the memories still retained by my soul from that Great Trans-Australian Adventure of 2010. For Mount Remarkable forever looms as elevated and majestic before my Inner Eye as it did before my physical eyes during that ephemeral moment in time when I was gazing enraptured at it from my fiery Ford Falcon, while excited by the freedom of *the unimpeded road*, and headed, as we shall soon see, for the delightful locations of Horrocks Pass and Wilmington.

Verdant and serene, the massif rises abruptly from the desiccated, ginger plains around it, until, 961 vertical meters later, it forms the slanted, almost projecting summit so aptly styled "remarkable" by the explorer Edward John Eyre (1815–1901). He, it seems, was referring to the view afforded by it, but I am in love with its *shape*.

A few kilometers later, I turn right, onto the B56 or Horrocks Pass Road – a discouraging name, but a beautiful drive, as it turns out. By way of a number of twists and turns, nestled between clusters of aged gum trees with silvery trunks and lofty, grass-covered hills, it brings me to the sheltered "backside", so to speak, of the Mount Remarkable range, and to the tiny, yet historic town and crossroads of *Wilmington*. According to some sources, the original name of this location, given to it by the daring European pioneers who arrived in the 1850s, was Beautiful Valley – a name which, if it had been kept, would *still* have been appropriate today, for even though the town itself it not much too look at, the attractiveness of the surroundings is almost as great as that of the Adelaide Hills, described earlier in this work. The town is not *entirely* devoid of charm, though – the absence of superficial, materialist "growth" for many years means that it has completely escaped the horrendously ugly impositions so frequently associated with late modern or "post-modern" architecture, and its open, dusty and somewhat forlorn appearance is highly reminiscent of that of many of the similarly sized towns in the American Midwest, and in a way contributes greatly to its charm.

The most prominent building is that of the Wilmington Hotel. According to locals, the town was once a busy crossroads, with *four* different establishments servicing thirsty and tired travellers, but the hotel which is today called *the Wilmington* is now the only one remaining. It is certainly historic, going back as it does to 1879, when it opened its doors under the name of *the Globe Hotel*. It is a traditional, fairly spacious pub with taps and seating and a kitchen on the first floor, and a handful of basic hotel rooms on the floor above it. The stairs leading up to the latter are creaky and rather cumbersome, and the rooms lack bathrooms, but the one I get does at least have a good location, meaning that it is not directly above the pub, where the late evening is likely to bring a bit of benign clamour, but at the back of the building, with a view towards the mountains. The accommodation is also among the cheapest I have come across – only 50 Australian dollars or so for a night.

In the late afternoon, I decide to take a closer look at the Mount Remarkable National Park, which is accessible by car by way of a road just to the south of Wilmington. After crossing a river bed, which, in spite of the season, is completely dry, but where a sign, somewhat absurdly, warns the driver of the danger of flooding, the road starts climbing the slopes constituting the northern and eastern reaches of the park. As the sun is setting, I decide not to drive all the way up into the densely wooded heart of the park, however, but to save that for the morrow. Nevertheless, before I turn back, I come upon a broad, sunlit meadow, sprinkled with dark blue flowers of some unknown kind, and where not bordered by cornucopia of trees, it affords a view towards the solemn contrasts of the east. There, far away, a strange, almost menacing prospect of vast, deserted plains, extending all the way to the hazy inland horizon, unfolds itself. Presently that vista is lent a reddish, melancholic beauty by the golden light radiating onto it from the unseen heavens of the west, but even while so illuminated, it remains something alien, conspicuously devoid of life.

The greatest experience of that day is still ahead of me, however. By chance, it seems, I remember having passed a sign for something called “Hancocks Lookout” just as I was

closing in on Wilmington. I decide to check it out. The road leading to the viewpoint is unsealed, and rather uneven, but looks safe enough, even for a car such as mine, with its minimal ground clearance. A few kilometers on, I finally arrive at the lookout, which has a spectacular situation, on top of a long ridge just to the south of Horrocks Pass. There are a couple of hours or so left before the sun sets, and there is a lovely, slightly muted yellow light gracing the landscape, so my first priority becomes the capturing of some decent photographs. A tall fence, surrounding the entire lookout, limits my ability to move and to compose, but I am still able to enjoy an almost 180-degree panoramic view towards the northwest. In the vicinity of the lookout, it is dominated by the largely bare and grass-covered hills and ridges surrounding Horrocks Pass, where scattered gum trees of great girth hint at the dense woods which must once have covered this area. Further away, towards the sunset, the hills rapidly fall away and disappear, giving way to an immense, indistinct plain, now increasingly swaddled in darkness, where hardly anything can be discerned, save the elongated, luminous intrusion into it which is constituted by the Spencer Gulf.

Beyond that salty inlet lie the enigmatic expanses of the Eyre, almost inseparable now from the far and darkening horizon, where the seemingly tiny, yet intriguing shapes of distant mountains manifest themselves as greyish, half translucent silhouettes below the intensely red and orange glow of the sunset, which the sun *itself* has now left behind. “I desire to go with you,” the summit of my soul quietly whispers to the departing, hidden sun – “I desire nothing more than to enter into that country of warmth and promise and glory now slowly but surely moving away into the west, and to be with *you* forever, and *never* return,” it slowly murmurs – and one day I shall indeed do so, God willing, O Sun of my Heart, O Secret and *Hidden* Sun, O Sun of Life and unspeakable Power and Grandeur.

Then a rejuvenating perception of adventure overtakes my sombre yearning, and I am reminded of my childhood hero, Captain Grant, and of his wife and children, and I wonder what the very real European heroes and explorers that imaginary character represented would have thought, had they been with me here *now*. There are no longer, as

in their day, any *truly* unknown lands, not in the part of this physical universe we call Planet Earth – and when I was in my late teens, and overflowing, as it were, with a desire for magnificent and immortalizing exploits, I deeply lamented that fact, and sincerely wished that I had been born in a different age – but on this luminous evening by Mount Remarkable, I spontaneously remind myself that those lands below the sunset and beyond are still unknown to *me*, and effortlessly accept that state of affairs as sufficient.

Then, as the sunset fades away, the day transitions, almost imperceptibly, into the *blue* hour – l'heure bleue – and for a while, it seems that the whole world has been absorbed into a marvellous blue glow – a glow of holiness and hope and fulfilment. At some point, while I am busy adoring the dark, exotic shapes of tall, majestic gum trees, reaching for those elevated sections of the glowing sky where stars are beginning to appear, a large and rugged SUV suddenly appears. It comes to a halt just a few meters away, and turns out to belong to a young man from the Czech Republic, of all places. He is planning to spend the night here, inside his car, which he has fitted with all kinds of ingenious implements, and as the twilight begins to morph into a rather chilly spring night, he kindly offers me a hot cup of tea, made in the rear of his vehicle. It is with some benign envy that I wish him the best of luck, ignite the engine of my car and drive back to my squeaky little hotel room in Wilmington, so far removed, it seems, from the starry heights of Hancock Lookout, which I may never see again, but I am also tired after a day full of new impressions, and eager to greet the morrow rested and refreshed.

September 25

The following day seems suffused with a brilliant light from the very start. I awake even earlier than usual, skip the English breakfast I could have had in the pub, carry my bulky luggage down the carpeted stairs and back into the car, and unhesitatingly set off for Mount Remarkable National Park, aiming to drive all the way to the pinnacle of the sealed road this time.

I cross the dry riverbed again, pass by the meadow with the blue flowers, and soon find

myself in the middle of a vast and beautiful and mounting woodland. The trees are not very large, but the forest seems natural and healthy, and an exceedingly crisp early morning light, bluish but already warm, is filtering through the glistening evergreen leaves of the canopy above. There is no one around, and I pause for a moment to enjoy the scene and the sensation it recalls in me. As on other sections of my journey, I am reminded of that *blessed time* I had in Sydney roughly a decade earlier, for back then I also experienced this special kind of woodland light, which seems to me to be a peculiarly *Australian* kind of light – or so I would prefer to think. O Australia, my Summerland – land of youth and romance, land of everlasting sunlight and of boundless seas – will I ever see you again?

I am torn of out my reveries by a most unexpected sight – an emu with two large chicks, standing in the middle of the road. This is the Australian ostrich, so to speak – not quite as tall as its African counterpart, but an equally strange and startling sight to the visitor. The adult bird is mainly brownish in color, and not very pleasing to the human eye, but the youngsters are characterized by long, white stripes running horizontally along their bodies, and are actually very cute.

In spite of their keen eyes, both the mother and the offspring appear to be unaware of the presence of a human being, as so often seems to be the case with wildlife when approached by way of a car, and I am able to get an amazingly good look at the feathered family as I slowly drive past them and continue my journey toward the loftier parts of the park.

Before long, I spot a wallaby squatting between some bushes. I have not seen one of those in real life since I accidentally bumped into one with my car while exploring the region near Frenchman's Cap in western Tasmania in April 2003. They are basically small kangaroos, highly reminiscent of the one many older readers will fondly remember from the TV series *Skippy the Bush Kangaroo*.

There was indeed a time when the content of television was almost entirely benign, and

when much of it could have been described as innocent. Then as now, the news media were often lying by omission, and many Hollywood movies were subtly manipulative, but the outrageous decadence and the abhorrent sexual perversion which has now become almost unavoidable were then very nearly absent.

The morning is still young and fresh when I park my car on a small parking lot near Alligator Gorge. It is a lovely little spot, with rugged, reddish cliffs and cool shades, surrounded by vast amounts of greenery. I go for a short walk to further inspect the place, but come to the conclusion that the depths of the gorge do not look sufficiently spectacular to warrant the expenditure of time and effort required to reach them, and so I return to the car and continue my exploration of the road, which to me seems much more exciting than the ravine itself.

There are a couple of official camp-grounds inside the national park, by the way, high atop these beautiful, forested ridges, and if you, dear reader, ever get a chance to visit the Wilmington area, I would strongly recommend spending a night or two at one of them.

As I drive on, I am treated to one of the loveliest of all the impressions granted to me this morning by the Lord of Hosts, namely that of trees with large clusters of flowers of a bright, light yellow color – akin to that of lemons, only more intense – surrounded by green leaves, and set against the backdrop of a blue and cloudless and profoundly elevating southern sky.

With the visit to the Mount Remarkable ridges satisfactorily accomplished, I continue on to the village of Melrose, which is located a few kilometers to the south of Wilmington. The place is indeed as lovely as its name, tastefully positioned inside a park-like stretch of woodland, where many of the houses and the other buildings are partially hidden by and plentifully shaded by tall, glistening gums.

It is simply untrue that many or most of the Europeans of recent history disrespected and exploited nature wherever they went – although it must be admitted that ***some*** of them

did – in actuality, no people – if I may refer to Europeans as a single ***people*** – ever created permanent settlements more aesthetically pleasing and more ***discerningly adapted*** to their natural surroundings, nor did any people ever treat at least some of the species of the animal kingdom – such as the horse and the dog – with more love and respect. The notion that Europeans indiscriminately slew and cut down and destroyed virtually everything in the places were they arrived is little more than yet another ***modern myth***, slyly authored by certain spiteful people and certain secretive communities, for certain political and religious and psychological ***ends***.

To put it in the subversive language emanating from Illuminism, Jacobinism and Marxism, and thus use it in a manner contrary to the satanic goals of its creators, Europeans often *enriched* the localities they colonized, and this is perhaps particularly evident on the peculiar island continent of Australia, where many regions were left, so to speak, in a rather monotonous and homogenous state by the forces of Nature Herself, and thus in need of some ***enrichment***. Exceedingly lovely towns and villages like Geelong, Lorne, Port Fairy, Robe, Victor Harbor, Stirling and Melrose, which even today, in spite of some disruptive late modern intrusions, strike the sensitive and genuinely educated visitor as ***built environments*** perfectly in tune with their environment, and therefore as truly ***sustainable***, are irrefutable examples of how European immigration and pioneering often beautified and complemented the colonies – and many, many more examples could be given.

Having seen some of Melrose, I drive back to Wilmington, and then northwards and into the interior of South Australia, where I refuel at Quorn – possibly the town which is the most evocative of the Wild West and the America of the old movies in all of that part of Australia. It is a dry and dusty and rust-colored place, with many buildings of a somewhat rough and antiquated appearance. A part of me likes it, finding a certain fascination in its exotic atmosphere, but I have a great deal else to see, and so, I do not linger very long in Quorn, but continue inland on the B83, the highway leading to another small town called Hawker, as soon as I have had a little break in the sun.

The landscape soon becomes rather bleak and arid, and remains that way for much of this leg of the journey, and I gradually get a sense of desolation which I have rarely gotten in Australia before. According to information I read before embarking on my adventure, these regions can sometimes be awash with colourful wildflowers, but now there are no flowers to be seen anywhere – possible because the spring seems to be unusually dry this year. At the crumbling remains of a European homestead named Kanyaka, my feeling of melancholy reaches its peak – the sight of the brownish remnants of walls built more than 150 years ago, surrounded by vast expanses of only mildly undulating land, partly covered in greyish shrubs, and partly barren, makes an impression on the mind that I will never forget, and I marvel at the daring and the willpower that once made European settlers attempt to make a home for themselves, and a living, in a place like this, where there is not even a stable and secure source of water anywhere nearby. Perhaps the climate was slightly more humid when they first came here, but eventually the desert-like conditions proved too harsh for people as well as cattle, and Kanyaka was abandoned to the elements forever.

Some 30 kilometers on from Kanyaka I at least reach Hawker, which is a town laid out on a typically Australian (and one could also say American) grid of broad, straight avenues, with a sprinkling of mostly older buildings and somewhat worn-out-looking evergreen gum trees. It is a pleasant enough place, a little bit greener than Quorn, perhaps, but strangely quiet, almost a tad spooky. I quickly explore the center of it, making a mental note of the presence of a large and decent-enough-looking motel – the only one, it seems – and then point that "hot" orange Ford of mine towards yet another goal – the distant mountain range that is the Flinders Ranges National Park. By *Zeus*, what a wonder, what a *marvel* to be ever *on the way* – ever journeying, ever living life anew, discovering, uncovering, surveying wonders every hour, every day, rising with the dawn, and with the brightness of the dawn *within oneself* – moving ever onwards on this worldly plane, while shooting upwards on the plane of soul – *if only it could last*!

I faintly glimpse them now, those distant Indo-European ancestors of mine, boldly crossing the grassy steppes of Asia with their proud and hallowed horses and their herds

of bellowing cattle, as the hubs of their cherished wheels were faintly glowing – *this* was how they lived; always on the move, or ready for another quest, always welcoming the thrill of unknown lands, and the enigmatic promise of the ever-receding horizon. In that fashion, they very nearly reached "the ends of the earth", and gradually settled down and prospered across a realm extending from Scotland and Ireland in the west to China in the east, and by so doing, laid the foundations for the world as we know it today.

The spaces before me are huge, yet they are rapidly crossed, and I soon find myself surrounded by tall and stony hills, and by groves of large gums. It is a charming place, a kind of valley, partly lost in shadows now that evening is approaching, and partly illuminated by the increasingly golden glow of the setting afternoon sun.

The place is also surprisingly desiccated, however – there is not so much as a flower or a trickle of water to be seen anywhere – and that disheartening aridity, combined with a lack of time of search out a truly inviting camp site, leads me to turn the car around and commence the drive back to Hawker, where I can have the comfort and predictability of a quiet motel room. It is a somewhat unwise and chickenhearted decision, but it is not without its rewards, for on the way back, I catch some tantalizing and unforgettable glimpses of the remote and otherworldly ridges called the Elder Ranges, whose far-off rocky faces are glowing poignantly with the reflection of the crimson evening sun. After a detour to check out a local hill, I reach the motel just in time to settle in before nightfall.

September 26

This late September day, a day of spring down under, will develop into a truly remarkable one. I do not know it yet when I rise out of my comfy motel bed in Hawker, but the afternoon will come to constitute one of those splendid parts of the journey that I will be able to watch like a kind of movie-clip inside myself forever. Granted, the initial part of the drive, which is the one to Port Augusta, is not all that amazing, but the B83, the Flinders Ranges way, does take me through some pleasant hill country after a while, in the area where the road goes through a natural pass, or rather a gentle indent, in the

narrow part of the ranges that lies to the north of Mount Remarkable, and that almost touches the shallow northernmost bay of the Spencer Gulf. Then, as I leave Port Augusta, which does not seem like a particularly interesting or attractive city, behind, and close in on the gigantic Eyre Peninsula, the adventure begins in earnest.

At this point I am faced with what seems like a somewhat difficult choice – I can either go west on the A1 Eyre Highway, and then make a detour and explore the Gawler Ranges National Park for a while, or go south and aim for the pointed tip of the huge, triangular peninsula just mentioned, but I cannot do both, as that would consume too much time. To give the reader an idea of the distances involved, the Gawler Ranges are approximately 340 kilometers away, while Port Lincoln, the southernmost town on the peninsula, is around 350 kilometers distant from my location.

I eventually opt for the latter option, without much regret, since I have already seen some Australian mountains, and am intrigued by *the remote cape* formed by the Eyre Peninsula as it reaches out into the Pacific, or rather the Indian Ocean, with no other competition than that attempted by its much smaller and narrower sibling to the east, the Yorke, which I have already visited.

I have always been intrigued by such locations – locations where I get a sense of having reached the very "ends of the earth", as it were, and of being in a place which does not seem like a merely accidental and insignificant conjunction of the inscrutable lines of time and space, but which strikes me as imbued with both a geographical and spiritual importance of some kind.

As I start heading south on the B100, the Lincoln Highway, initially surrounded by dry, levels plains which could make one think of the more desert-like portions of Arizona or Nevada, plains now baking in the rising Australian sun, it also begins to dawn on me just how enormous the landmass described as the "peninsula" of Eyre actually is. Even a rough, conservative estimate of its size yields a perimeter of circa 900 kilometers, and a landmass of circa 38,000 square kilometers. That makes it nearly as large as the island

state of Tasmania, and significantly larger than that cape-like southern part of Norway, bounded by the North sea and its extensions on three sides. The Eyre is, in other words, almost the size of a small country.

Continuing south, I first encounter the town of Whyalla, where I locate a supermarket and stock up the kind of supplies I have mentioned once before – supplies of the sort that I can eat in a motel room, or even in the car, without having to cook (since the vast majority of such rooms are only equipped with a water boiler and a small microwave oven), and that keep well in the heat that is building – heavy, moist fruitcakes of the Black and Gold brand, canned yet delicious Irish Stew, various crunchy biscuits, ripe but not too ripe bananas, some sliced bread, some roasted and salted nuts, some bottled water, and so on and so forth.

There are times when life, in spite of all its problems and challenges, seems pretty good, and well worth living, and this is definitely one of them. Here I am, on the other side of the world compared to where I usually am, in an entirely new part of the Great Southern Land, and for several weeks to come, I am free to go wherever I want, and to do whatever I like – all I need to keep in mind is that I should be in Perth in about a month, on or around the 20th of October. As I exit the mall and walk over to my car, two attractive girls on the other side of the parking lot cast glances in my direction, look at each other, and laugh – in a flirtatious kind of way, it seems. I choose to ignore them, as I have so much else I would like to do, but the episode does heighten the sense of adventure, and for a while, it almost seems like I am living a scene in that movie mentioned earlier, Ocean's Eleven.

After Whyalla, the scenery remains rather bleak for a while, but the gloriously blue sky and the intense sunlight lends even the seemingly endless, shrub-covered plains I am surrounded by a certain charm. It is as though I am floating, no, *flying* into a realm of perpetual summer. After a while, I reach the small coastal town of Cowell, where I consider renting a room at the huge old pub which is also a primitive hotel, but since the rooms are not all that attractive, and I still have much of the day left, I decide to drive on,

not really knowing or wanting to know where I will eventually end up.

My choice is richly rewarded, as it turns out. At some point to the south of Cowell, the landscape slowly but surely becomes greener and greener, and also more undulating, until the terrain traversed by the almost empty road is more reminicent of the fields of Western Ireland than of the desert I was in only an hour or two ago.

In fact, observing this remarkable transition from the scorched and browish plains around Port Augusta and Whyalla to the glistening greenery of the southern third or so of Eyre will stand out as one of the most memorable of all my experiences on this leg of the journey. While the upper parts of the peninsula were positively arid, and hardly fit for human habitation, I now have before me a glorious vista of emerald pastures, where innumerable blades of grass are waving and trembling in the balmy wind, and glowing with a tinge of gold in the late afternoon sun.

The reason for these differences has to be climatic, and they would seem to indicate that the southernmost parts of Eyre get much more precipitation, and have a far more humid climate, than the rest of the peninsula, but I do not ponder these impressions further, since the sun is setting, and I need to find a place to spend the night. It is a wonderfully warm and golden early evening when I drive into the significant settlement that is the seaside town of Tumby Bay to check out the accommodation options. However, as the prices turn out to be compartively high, and the weather is absolutely fantastic, and I remember seeing a road sign mentioning a Lipson Beach and camping, I turn back and locate the road to the beach, finding the camping option rather attractive. The road is a few kilometers long, and is covered in fairly rough gravel, but it looks smooth enough, even for a car with only moderate ground clearance.

To my great surprise, the rather remote camp site, which is reasonably spacious, is full of people, some with motorhomes and some with tents. I manage to find a reasonably secluded spot at the southern and somewhat elevated end of the site, however, where I put up my little, green, superlight Norwegian hiking tent (Helsport “Ringstind”) on a

patch of grass right next to the fence seperating the camping area from the grassy fields surrounding it on the peninsula side. By the time I am completely done, darkness is falling, but it is an exceptionally beautiful evening, considering the time of the year; the ocean beyond the beach being as silky-smooth as velvet and tinged with a muted, yet lovely light blue, slightly violet color for as far as the eye can see, and the perfectly clear and cloudless western and southwestern sky glowing with the glorious blues and yellows and "bluegreens" so characteristic of the time after sunset on days when not even the slightest haze is obstructing the light being emitted by the hidden sun.

As the tent is bound to get extremely hot almost as soon as the sun rises again – there being no source of shade whatsoever in my area of the campgrounds – I go to sleep fairly early, around nine or thereabouts, hoping to get the ideal eight hours of sleep well before the night is over. Fortunately, there is no noise to speak of being produced by the other guests at the site, and I only remain awake a very short while after entering the sleeping bag, and remember little else than waking to a wonderful, warm and golden sunshine very early on the morning thereafter, i.e. on September the 27th.

September 27

Thinking back, I am not sure exactly what the time was when I got out of the tent and into the cool morning air outside on that blessed morning at Lipson Beach, but since the light still had that uplifting and invigorating morning quality to it, and the rest of the campsite was completely quiet, save for the chirpings of the birds, I doubt that it was later than approximately seven o'clock. I could of course have stayed there for another night, and perhaps I should have, but I was again possessed by that intense restlessness and curiosity and sense of adventure which I often felt so strongly when I was younger – and which seems encapsulated in that old hit by U2, "I still have not found what I am looking for" – and so, after a quick bread and fruitcake breakfast, I pull down the dewy tent and start the car. As I am leaving the area, and look back at the small headland where I spent the night, Lipson Beach looks particularly enticing, forming a narrow, but beautiful

crescent of shining, almost perfectly white sand. It is small by Australian standards, but nevertheless lovely. I briefly exist the car to take some photographs, and then I drive back to the Lincoln Highway and continue my journey towards the tantalizing southern part of the Eyre. A few kilometers later, I am back in the town of Tumby Bay, which looks very inviting indeed on this calm and sunny morning. There is not a very great deal to see in the town itself – certain other places of a similar size, such as Port Fairy in Victoria or Robe in South Australia, had much more to offer in terms of architecture and the built environment – but the Esplanade in Tumby Bay, wonderfully clean and tidy, and shaded by some tall conifers, and flanked by green lawns on one side and creamcolored expanses of fine sand on the other, is absolutely gorgeous, and the exceptionally long wooden wharf or jetty, jutting far out into the sea of the bay, constitutes an amazing little walk, as I soon find out. The water surrounding it goes from being fairly shallow in the vicinity of the Esplanade to being several meters deep around its tip, and when the crystal clear sea reaches a certain depth, the kind of depth where the sandy, flawless bottom is no longer easily visible, it also takes on a stunning, brightly green color, highly reminiscent of the color of true emerald. In fact, as I stand gazing at the sparkling water and the distant town from the wooden boards of the wharf, I doubt that I have ever seen such strikingly emerald-colored water before, though I may perhaps have seen it while in Sydney, ten years earlier.

The name and settlement of Tumby has a charming history, but the way. According to a “History” web page published by the District Council of Tumby Bay, it is as follows:

Like much of the coastline of the Eyre Peninsula, Matthew Flinders first explored Tumby Bay in 1802. Flinders first named the bay and a nearby island after the village of Tumby in Lincolnshire, England. It was not until 1900 that the town of Tumby Bay was first surveyed, and the first Council meeting of the District Council of Tumby Bay was held on the 21st July, 1906.

Settlers began moving into the area from the early 1840's. In Old English language the name means “fenced village”. When the area was first settled in the 1840's, one of the

earliest settlers was named Harvey, and the area was known as Harvey Bay. Wheat and sheep farming industries developed in the area and still provide the main focus today, together with a fast developing tourist trade. In the early years, Tumby Bay was an important grain and loading port servicing the cereal and heep farming industries. Today it is a service centre for the surrounding farmers and, like the rest of the area, a popular destination for holiday makers.

In 1900 when the town was proclaimed it was named “Tumby” but the local residents added the word “Bay” to it. In April 1984, at the recommendation of the Geographical Names Board, the name was officially changed to “Tumby Bay”. (…)

The [first] jetty was built in 1874, the second jetty to be built on [the entire] Eyre Peninsula. Mrs Edwin Harvey performed the opening ceremony by cracking a bottle of champagne over the new structure. The need for the jetty became apparent when ore from the Burrawing Mine was shipped through Tumby. Prior to the jetty, the copper ore and other goods including wheat and wool were loaded into dingies from days or wagons to be transhipped out to larger vessels in deep water. In recent years a new commercial jetty has been built to replace the original jetty, dismantled in 1999 due to it being unsafe.

After the signal highlight of the Tumby Esplanade and its great wharf, I drive around in the more or less empty center of the town for a while, taking note of the small, but charming old sandstone building that is St. Margaret's Anglican Church, as well as the very American-looking “Assembly of God”-building, before somewhat reluctantly returning to the highway and continuing on in the direction of the much larger town of Lincoln.

Draft

My next stop on the way is Louth Bay
nothing exceedingly remarkable about it, but a lovely place of curious stone formations and views of stunningly clear and bluegreen water

Sheringa Beach
A lonely gravel road
The weather has grown cloudy and cold, and a gale is blowing from the ocean to the west
The road bring me across wide fields, past a very primitive and completely empty camp site located behind dunes so large that I cannot even see their sandy summits, and past a very large bay facing the wide-open ocean, where the wind is blowing so forcefully that it is difficult to exit the car, and almost impossible to take decent photos
The sea has been whipped into a frenzy of foaming waves, many of which are dark and menacing and some of which are glistening and glittering in beams of rapidly varying sunlight

Amazing, shifting light
In no location on any of my travels have I ever gotten a greater, more intense sense of having reached the ends of the Earth, or the boundaries of the world as we know it
The somewhat distant sanddunes are gigantic, like tall hills or small mountains
Shade predominates, but now and then, rays of light strike and illuminate the enormous dunes
Even though they are between one and several km away, I can see streams of sand being blown off the tops of the dunes by the ocean gale, as if the sand was snow in a snow storm
It is a truly otherworldly, almost frightening spectacle
There is something alien and very lonely and bizarre about it, asoething that seems to belong on a different planet, or in a sci-fi movie
Behind the dunes, the air is full of drizzling sand
Otherwise I would have put up my tent there

I do not continue my journey in that direction, however, but, resuming the westerly direction of my journey, I explore the magnificent Eyre Peninsula, traverse the intimidating Nullabor Plain and enter the remote and exotic state of Western Australia.

Of that part of my Trans-Australian journey I aim to speak in the second and presently unwritten part of this book, so do stay tuned for that.